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DEFENCE

OF

Reveal'd Religion.





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OF

Revel'd Religion

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# DEFENCE

OF

## Reveal'd Religion

AGAINST

The EXCEPTIONS of a late Writer,  
in his Book, Intituled,

*Christianity as Old as the Creation, &c.*

---

By JOHN CONYBEARE, D.D.

Rector of Exeter-College in OXFORD.

---

Nunc parvulos nobis dedit igniculos, quos celeriter malis moribus opinionibusque depravati sic restringimus, ut nusquam natura lumen appareat: Sunt enim ingeniis nostris semina innata virtutum; qua si adolescere liceret, ipsa nos ad beatam vitam natura perduceret. Nunc autem, simul atque editi in lucem & suscepti sumus, in omni continuo pravitate, & in summa opinionum perversitate versamur: ut pene cum lacte matricis errorem suxisse videamur.

Cicer. Disp. Tuscul. Ed. Dav. Cant. 1723. p. 166.

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Printed by J. G. Smith, at the British Museum, London.



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TO THE  
Right Reverend Father in GOD,  
**EDMUND**  
LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

My LORD,



*THE following Work humbly  
craves Your Lordship's Ac-  
ceptance ; to whom I should  
be induc'd to address it, from  
the Nature of the Design, and Your  
Lordship's great Concern for the Interests  
of*



## DEDICATION.

*of Religion, tho' I had not been oblig'd to do so, in Acknowledgment of many personal Favours receiv'd from Your Lordship.*

Indeed the Book itself owes its Birth to Your Lordship's Encouragement ; in which if I have not succeeded according to my Wishes, I may plead that it was drawn up amidst a Variety of Interruptions, and under a bad State of Health. This will in some Sort excuse the Author, tho' it may detract from the Performance.

But the Cause I am defending will receive less Prejudice from the Defects of inferior Advocates, when it is consider'd in how Masterly a Way Your Lordship hath already supported it. The principal Questions in this Controversy have been determin'd in Your Lord-

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## DEDICATION

Lordship's PASTORAL LETTERS, to  
the Satisfaction of every reasonable  
Enquirer; in which we see with Plea-  
sure how much additional Force Argu-  
ment receives, when it is manag'd with  
Temper.

How different is the Conduct of our  
Adversaries! in whose Writings no-  
thing is more remarkable than an entire  
Contempt of Decency: Fit Method to  
be us'd in so bad a Cause!

But, let our Adversaries go on in  
their own Way; Truth will maintain  
itself notwithstanding: And that which  
could support itself under Ten dreadful  
Persecutions, is not to be born down  
at this Time of Day by hard Words.  
Religion will enlarge its Credit, whilst  
it is defended by Your Lordship's Pen,  
and illustrated by Your Example.

I shall

# DEDICATION.

I shall add no more, but my sincerest  
Wishes for Your Lordship's Happiness  
and long Life; and in this I wish one  
of the greatest Blessings which can hap-  
pen to this Church and Nation.

Permit me to subscribe myself,

Your LORDSHIP'S

most dutiful,

most devoted,

humble Servant,

MAY 4th,  
1732.

JOHN CONIBEAR.



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# DEFENCE

## Reveal'd Religion, &c.

**W**HEN the Christian Religion was first propagated, St. Peter gave this Direction; That the Professors of it should be constantly prepar'd both to defend and to prove their Faith. *Be ready (saith he,) always to give an Answer to every Man that asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in you with Meekness and Fear.* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

It could not be expected, in the common Course of Things, but Questions of this Nature would arise, when a System was propos'd different from what had obtain'd be-

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fore ; and, in many Points, entirely inconsistent with Matters which had been reckon'd sacred. Every Man therefore was concern'd to be furnish'd with apt Matter of Reply, as well for the Security of his own Faith, as the Conviction of others.

What Regard was paid to this Apostolical Injunction, may fairly be concluded from the mighty Progress of this Religion. It is certain and known Matter of Fact, that within the Compass of a few Years it spread itself through a great Part of the World : It was receiv'd, notwithstanding the Prejudices of Education, and Oppositions of The Civil Power : The Grounds and Reasons of it were made so apparent, that Men of all Circumstances embrac'd it : And its Conquests were still carried on farther, 'till at length it gain'd on those Powers which had hitherto oppos'd it.

When these Difficulties were gotten over, and Christianity was become the general and establish'd Profession ; after it had pass'd thro' all Tryals, and approv'd itself to the Judgment of every impartial Man, one might hope there would be no farther Occasion to enter into those Points, which had been debated in the more early Ages : At least, that after a Possession of almost Seventeen Hundred Years, during which Time our Claim had been maintain'd by the strongest Force of Argument, we should not be call'd upon  
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REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 3

to begin anew, and to set forth the Original Title by which we hold.

Had indeed our Cause been carried on in a suspicious Manner; never fairly decided; but supported merely by Artifice, and the Misapplication of Civil Force; there might have been some Reason to call us back, and to put us upon proving those Matters, which hitherto had not been prov'd at all. But as every thing of real Moment in this Cause, every thing which could afford just Ground of Debate, hath, some Time or other, been thoroughly sifted, and fully settled, it surely becomes Matter of Complaint, that these Things are any more brought in Question; That the Ministers of The Gospel are interrupted in discharging a main Part of their Office; are call'd off, from instructing their People in the Doctrines and Duties of Christianity; and oblig'd to guard them, as well as they may, against a total Revolt from this Religion.

Yet This is in Truth the Case. More hath of late Years been attempted this Way than in many former Ages. Several Methods have been us'd to this Purpose by different Persons: And, as soon as One Scheme hath been defeated, we have seen a new one advanc'd with equal Assurance, and recommended with equal Diligence.

I shall not concern myself at present with those Performances, which have been principally



# 4 A DEFENCE of

cially levell'd at the external Proofs of our Religion. These have been thoroughly examin'd by several Learned and Good Men. And tho' it cannot but prove Matter of Grief, that a Cause so important should meet with any kind of Opposition, yet we have this Comfort however, that some Advantages have arisen to us from this very Opposition. The Grounds of our Holy Faith have been hereby more distinctly consider'd: And, I hope, we are the more firm Believers from observing how much our Adversaries have fail'd in their Attempts against us.

Hitherto, for the most Part, Objections have been pointed, Either, at the Prophecies, (which, 'tis affirm'd, have been impertinently alledg'd on our Side;) Or, at the Miracles, (which, 'tis pretended, were never really and in Fact wrought;) Or, at some particular Doctrines, (which our Adversaries have thought fit to reject as impossible.) At length a Gentleman appears, resolv'd to carry the Matter farther. Not content to rest the Controversy on a common Foot, he boldly undertakes what few have been adventurous enough to maintain before him: And, besides what he alledges, in some Parts of his Book, against the Facts or Tradition of The Gospel, he directs his chief Aim at the Foundation of the Whole.

His grand Design, is, To prove, that there neither hath been, nor possibly can be any Revelation.

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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 5

Revelation at all: And the main Principle on which he builds, is This; That the Light of common Reason is abundantly sufficient without it. Revelation, he maintains, can teach us nothing, which every Man's Reason might not as perfectly teach him before. From hence he would have us conclude, *"that it most certainly does not follow."* that all Information this Way must be entirely superfluous; utterly unworthy of God, because useless and unprofitable to Man.

Were there really none Occasion for The Interposition of The Supreme Being to support and carry on the Affairs of Religion; and could this Negative be fully made appear, we should be forc'd to give up our Cause. For, a perfectly wise Being cannot act in vain. Whenever He interposes, something is intended worthy of his Care, and which cannot be so well obtain'd without it. *"a fair conclusion"*

But then, it lies on our Adversaries, to make full Proof of this Point, "That a Revelation cannot possibly be of any Service to us." They should shew, that no important Doctrine can possibly be inculcated this Way, which might not be as well deduc'd from the Principles of human Reason; — no Precepts given, which Men were not equally concern'd to observe before; — nothing of any kind declar'd, which every Man could not perfectly and easily discover without this Aid; — no Means, no Assistance, *"most truly, as certainly, they can never prove this point, at the"*



## 6 A DEFENCE of

sistances, no Enforcements with Regard to a virtuous Life afforded; which did not lie clearly before Men's Minds antecedently to any Revelation about them. All these Particulars, besides several others of a like Nature, ought to be evinc'd beyond Exception: And whether The Gentleman I am now concern'd with hath succeeded in this, is the Point in Question.

It may not be improper to represent This Gentleman's Scheme somewhat more distinctly, the principal Branches of which, are, I conceive, truly express'd in the following Propositions.

*Prop. 1.* God always intended Men should have some Religion.

*2.* This Religion is the Religion of Nature.

*3.* The Religion of Nature is absolutely perfect.

*4.* As such, it must be immutable; neither capable of having any of its Precepts cancell'd, nor of receiving any additional Precepts.

*5.* Therefore, if any Revelation be vouchsafed us, it must entirely fall in with The Religion of Nature.

*6.* This Religion of Nature is easily, and perfectly discoverable by every Man, even by those of the meanest Capacity.

*7.* It is more easily, and more perfectly discoverable by every Man, than either the Proof or Meaning of any Revelation can be.

From

## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 7

From whence he would have us infer;  
8. That a Revelation is perfectly needless,  
and superfluous.

I do by no Means affirm that every thing  
advanc'd by This Gentleman, in the Per-  
formance now before me, is indeed reduci-  
ble to the foregoing Propositions; but only,  
that they contain the principal Branches of  
his Scheme; that they give us a real View  
both of the End he aims at, and the several  
Steps by which he pursues this End. This  
is all which I think myself concern'd with  
here: And if I can succeed so far as to sup-  
port the Cause of Religion against the At-  
tempts made on it in these several Articles;  
I shall gain what I contend for; and this  
Work will answer the Title I have set be-  
fore it.

As I have already unfolded the Scheme  
which I design to examine, and by reducing  
it to a few Propositions have brought it into  
View at once; so it will be equally proper  
for me to give the Reader some Insight into  
the Particulars of mine own Management.

I propose therefore to give some Satisfac-  
tion to the following Enquiries;

1. What we are to understand by The  
Law or Religion of Nature; From whence  
the Obligation of it arises; and how far it  
extends.

2. Whether This Religion of Nature be  
absolutely perfect.

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## 8 A DEFENCE of

*Pag 145.*

3. Whether it be immutable, in such a Sense as to be incapable of admitting any additional Precepts.

Under this Head I shall handle the Case of Positive Precepts in Matters of Religion.

4. Whether Natural, and Reveal'd Religion be necessarily One and the same; and if not, wherein the proper Distinction between them doth consist.

5. Whether a proper Rule of Life be easily, and perfectly discoverable by every Man, even by those of the meanest Capacity.

6. Whether it be more easily, and more perfectly discoverable by every Man, than the Proof, or Meaning of any Revelation can be.

7. Whether a Revelation be not expedient in order to a more easy, more perfect, and more general Knowledge of this Rule of Life.

8. Whether a Revelation be not expedient in order to enforce the general Practice of this Rule.

To which I shall add,

Lastly, Whether there be sufficient Grounds to believe the Reality of a Revelation, and especially of the Christian.

My Design being thus far explain'd, I shall now pursue these several Particulars in their proper Order,

C H A P.





CHAP. I.

*What we are to understand by The Law, or Religion of Nature; From whence the Obligation of it arises; and how far it extends.*



THE *Law of Nature*, and The *Religion of Nature* are Terms promiscuously us'd by this Gentleman; and so far as this I follow him readily. Only thus much should be observ'd; that all along, when I speak of Religion, I would be understood to include as well the Doctrines as the Precepts of it: Which Doctrines being not merely speculative, but having a greater or less Influence on Practice, should be consider'd, Either as Principles from which moral Rules follow as Conclusions; or, as Means, by attending to which Men are encourag'd to moral Duties. These are not peculiar to Reveal'd Religion, but make a considerable Part even of Natural.

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## 10 A DEFENCE of

I know a Distinction is usually made between Doctrines and Duties ; and a Distinction there doubtless is between them. Yet still it should be remember'd how closely they are connected together ; and that many of these Duties themselves cannot be perceiv'd distinctly, or discharg'd advantageously without the Belief and Influence of these Doctrines. Men are concern'd therefore to search out and to discover such Points, as far as they are by them discoverable ; To render them familiar to their Minds, when discover'd ; To pursue them thro' all their proper Consequences ; and to suffer them to have such an Effect on their Conduct and Behaviour as they have a direct Tendency to produce.

To proceed ; The Term *Religion* may be consider'd, Either as it signifies that comprehensive Rule, to which we should conform our Sentiments and Actions, in reference to God and Man ; or else, as it implies the inward and habitual Sense we have of these Matters on our Minds. Our Author in different Places uses this Term in each of these different Senses. But, to avoid Confusion, I shall confine myself to the former ; since we are now debating about the Rule itself, and enquiring "What System of Doctrines and Precepts we ought to embrace as our Religion."

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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 11

Having settled this Term, I am to observe, in the next Place, That the *Law*, or *Religion of Nature* is so call'd, Either, because it is founded in the Reason and Nature of Things; or, else, because it is discoverable by us in the Use and Exercise of those Faculties which we enjoy. The Religion of Nature, as it is consider'd in these different Views, will import quite different Things. In the former, it signifies a Perfect Collection of all those moral Doctrines, and Precepts which have a Foundation in the Reason and Nature of Things: But in the latter, it is such a Collection only, as may be discover'd by us in the Exercise of our proper Faculties, according to the Means and Opportunities we enjoy.

Our Author was aware of these several Senses of the Term. He hath noted and observ'd them both: But then he hath proceeded so unhappily, that whilst in the Beginning of his Work he defines it in One Sense, the Course of his Argument, most plainly requires Another Sense: And in some Places he expressly, and in Words, gives it a Meaning different from what he had before deliver'd in his Definition of the Term. I shall confirm this Remark by some Citations from this Author's Performance.

He begins his Second Chapter with an Explication of what he means by *The Religion of Nature*. "By *Natural Religion*, saith he, "I understand the Belief of the Existence

*This Distinction of the Term Religion of Nature is not new, but has been used by the Philosophers and Divines of all Ages. It is a very common Mistake to suppose that the Religion of Nature is a single, uniform System of Principles, and that it is the same in all Ages and Places. But the Religion of Nature is a Collection of Principles, and as such, it is subject to Variation. It is a Collection of Principles, and as such, it is subject to Variation. It is a Collection of Principles, and as such, it is subject to Variation.*

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“ of a God ; and the Sense and Practice of  
 “ those Duties, which result from the Know-  
 “ ledge we by OUR REASON have of  
 “ him and his Perfections ; and of ourselves,  
 “ and our own Imperfections, and of the Re-  
 “ lation we stand in to him and our Fellow-  
 “ Creatures.” P. 13. According to this Ac-  
 count, Natural Religion can reach no far-  
 ther than Natural Light and Reason can  
 carry us : For it comprehends under it those  
 Duties only, which result from the Know-  
 ledge we *by our Reason* have of God, and his  
 Perfections, &c.

Yet, notwithstanding this plain Expression  
 of his Meaning, he immediately subjoins,  
 “ So that the Religion of Nature takes in  
 “ every thing that is founded in the Reason  
 “ and Nature of Things.” What !  
 doth the Religion of Nature take in every  
 thing that is founded in the Reason and Na-  
 ture of Things, when, according to this Gen-  
 tleman's own Account, it reaches no farther  
 than we *by our Reason* are able to carry it ?  
 And if it reaches no farther than we *by our*  
*Reason* can carry it, doth it therefore follow,  
 that it takes in every thing which is founded  
 in the Nature and Reason of Things ? I  
 know but one Way to get over this Diffi-  
 culty ; viz. by asserting roundly, that *Hu-*  
*man Reason* is commensurate to all Truth ;  
 and that we *by our Reason* are capable of dis-  
 covering every thing which is founded in the  
 Nature and Reasons of Things.

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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 13

This is not the only Place in which this Gentleman hath adventur'd to give us different Accounts of the Religion of Nature. Thus, P. 376. he asserts, "The Law of Nature is nothing but what the Light of Nature, or Reason dictates." And yet, he had maintain'd before, P. 114. "That Natural Religion takes in all those Duties, which flow from the Nature and Reason of Things; and the Relation we stand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures." The former Account, he saw plainly, would by no Means answer his Purpose. He could not prove the Law, or Religion of Nature to be, in That Sense, an *absolutely perfect* Law. A fundamental Point in the Scheme he was upon could not receive the least Appearance of Support, but from this other Notion of the Law of Nature. He varies therefore his Account of this Point, as may best serve a present Purpose. He defines it in one Sense; and then reasons, and concludes from it in another.

In order to State this Matter more truly, and to settle the proper Notion of The Law, or Religion of Nature, (as it bears a Part in the present Question,) I shall distinctly consider it in both the Views already mention'd.

The first Sense, is This; It signifies a perfect Collection of all those moral Doctrines, and Precepts, which have a real Foundation

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are then y<sup>e</sup> Dutys flowing from the  
 Nature & Reason of Things Dutys in any other  
 respect than as they appear to be such from  
 the Light of Nature?



in the Nature and Reason of Things. This is what the present R. R. Lord Bishop of Bangor must be understood to intend, when he calls it "That Original Religion, which was as Old as the Creation." [*Sermon before the Society for Propagating the Gospel, p. 13.*] and afterwards, when he tells us, "That [Christ] came into the World, not merely to restore the Religion of Nature, but to adapt it to the State and Condition of Man; and to supply the Defects Not of Religion, which continued in its first Purity, and Perfection, but of Nature." p. 20. If by *Religion of Nature* His Lordship had not intended such a perfect Collection of all those moral Truths, and Precepts, which I have mention'd above, He would never have asserted, that this Religion [still] continued in its first Purity and Perfection; and that our Blessed Saviour did not come to supply the Defects of It, but of Nature.

The Term is us'd in the same Sense by another very Learned Writer; who, (in his Discourse concerning *The Nature, Obligation, and Efficacy of the Christian Sacraments*, p. 9.) tells us "That many the Scripture Duties which we have otherwise no Knowledge of, are yet justly referr'd to the Law of Nature; since Scripture hath discover'd what Foundation they have in the Nature and Truth of Things."

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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 15

Our Author himself, as I observ'd just now, hath, in several Parts of his Performance, consider'd the Law or Religion of Nature in this View; and pretended to draw Conclusions from it, taken in this Sense, in Prejudice of Divine Revelation.

In Opposition to what he maintains I shall therefore observe,

1. That this Notion is entirely wrong, as us'd and apply'd by this Writer. And,

2. Were it the true one, yet it will not come up to his Purpose; nor really support the Conclusions he draws from it.

First then, this Notion, as apply'd by the present Writer, is wrong. He tells us, that "Natural and Reveal'd Religion differ only as to the Manner of their being communicated." p. 5. — That, "the Divine Precepts must be the same, whether internally or externally reveal'd." p. 9. And it is the great Design of his whole Performance to prove, that an external Revelation is needless, because every thing, in which we can possibly have any Concern, is comprehended under That Law or Religion, which is founded in Nature, and as Old as the Creation. I would observe from hence, That Natural and Reveal'd Religion are here both of them supposed to be *communicated*; — That the Divine Precepts (as he terms them) in both, are supposed to be equally *reveal'd*, in the one *internally*, in the other *externally*;

*externally*; — and, that to prove an external Revelation needless, because every thing we can have any Concern in, is comprehended under That Law which is founded in Nature, must evidently imply, that we do, or may know what is contain'd under that Law: Otherwise an external Revelation may be highly serviceable in order to discover those Matters, which cannot be known without it; and so the Conclusion which he draws, will not seem to have the least Relation to the Principle laid down.

Natural Religion therefore must signify Such a Collection of Doctrines and Precepts, as is discoverable by us in the Use of our natural Faculties. It cannot include every thing which is founded in the Reason and Nature of Things, unless every thing so founded is by us discoverable. And tho' it should be allow'd, that every thing of that Kind is really discoverable by us, yet still these Matters will constitute the Law or Religion of Nature, *i. e.* will be *to us* The Law of Nature, Not merely as founded in the Nature of Things, but as we have Abilities to discover that they are so.

Every one knows that Promulgation is essential to a Law. Nothing therefore can, strictly speaking, be Part of a Law, which is incapable of being known to be such. And tho' human Magistrates content themselves with making a publick Declaration of their

their Will, and do not enter into the particular Opportunities of each single Person to discern it, yet the Case is otherwise with regard to the Supreme Being. Ignorance may be pleaded in a human Court, in Cases, where Men cannot possibly judge concerning the Truth and Reasonableness of the Plea. They are oblig'd therefore to set all Pretences of this Kind aside; and sometimes to lay Hardships on the Innocent, that they may not give too many Advantages to the Guilty. But God knows thoroughly the Capacities and Opportunities of all his Subjects. To him therefore are they accountable for their Conformity to those Rules only, which they did know, or might have known to be his Will: For Things entirely out of their Reach, are, with regard to them, no Matters of Law, and carry with them no Obligation at all.

If this be not thought so clear, as to supersede all Occasion of Proof whatsoever, let us only consider, upon what Account it is, that Brutes are exempted from moral Obligation, and the Restraints of Law. It is not, that a certain Rule and Measure of Action would not really add to the Happiness they enjoy at present, or better secure their Enjoyments to them. It is not, that they are absolutely unfurnish'd with natural Powers of doing any thing, either to promote each other's Good, or to prevent each other's Mis-

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chief, on any Occasion whatsoever. No; This is far from being the real State of the Case. But the Point rests here: They are not endu'd with such Measures, and Degrees of Reason, as may enable them to judge concerning the Causes and Consequences of Things. They are neither capable of forming to themselves a Rule; nor of discovering a Law-giver; nor of having the Rule enforc'd on them by the Prospect of future Good or Ill. They neither know a God, nor can discern his Will at all. Now, if Brutes are Therefore exempt from all Law whatsoever, because they are absolutely incapable of knowing it; what Conclusion can we draw from hence but This, That all other Beings are just so far oblig'd, as they, in their Circumstances, are capable of knowing a Law; or, in other Words, that nothing can possibly become Matter of Law to any one, which he is absolutely incapable of knowing.

Let us ascend from Brutes to Men. Idiots, and Mad-men are likewise exempt from moral Obligation; and treated as Persons entirely unaccountable even by Civil Powers, in all those Cases, where the Want of Reason is clear, and indisputable. But whence, I pray, doth this arise? Is it not built on this Principle, that no one is accountable for not conforming his Actions to a Rule entirely above his Comprehension?

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Once more; I would desire to know, How far Children, in their more tender Years, may be reckon'd as moral Agents. At first not at all; no more than even Brutes themselves. They are put under just the same Restraints as Brutes are; and by no Means left to their own Conduct or Discretion. As Reason opens, and proper Rules are suggested to them, which they are able to discern, and to retain, they become gradually accountable; They are so far strictly and properly oblig'd: And, as Reason is still farther improv'd, and more learnt, their Obligations are enlarg'd: Till, at length, when they come to Maturity, they are freed from the ordinary Restraints of Discipline; are turn'd over to their own Conduct; and consider'd on the same Foot with other Men. But, whence all this? Whence is it that Law and Obligation do not commence with our very Being; but are gradually enlarg'd, in Proportion to those Degrees of Reason which we acquire? The Case is plain enough: Obligation cannot reach farther than a Capacity of Knowledge; and Law cannot be extended farther than Obligation itself reaches. To suppose a Law, in regard to us, without a Capacity of discerning it, is altogether as absurd, as to make Things impossible the Subject, and Matter of Law.

Our Author himself is not insensible of this; For he tells us, p. 4. That "a Law,

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"as far as it is unintelligible, ceases to be a Law." What therefore he calls The Law of Nature, must, with respect to us, cease to be a Law any farther than it is by us intelligible; or, (as I should rather chuse to express it,) any farther than it is by us discoverable in the Use of Reason.

I cannot but observe, as I go along, our Author's Conduct on this Point. He tells

us, "God hath given Men a Law."

"This Law is The Law of Nature."

"This Law of Nature takes in every thing founded in the Reason and Nature

of Things."

"Therefore, Every thing founded in the

Reason and Nature of Things must be by

us discoverable."

"Otherwise, This Law of Nature will

cease to be a Law."

"For nothing can be a Law which is un-

intelligible."

Let us only assume this last Principle as

undoubtedly true, (and our Author will allow

us thus much, since he hath plainly laid it

down himself,) the Consequence from hence

is clear; If we are not capable of discover-

ing every thing which is founded in the Rea-

son and Nature of Things; then, such a

perfect Collection of Precepts, &c. as was

mention'd before, is not properly The Law

of Nature.

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# REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 21

It is true indeed, our Author maintains, that every thing of that Kind is discoverable by us : And the Cause why it is not in Fact discovered, is only This, Men will not make Use of their Reason for those Purposes for which it might and ought to serve. But to Assert is one Thing, and to Prove is another. Surely This will not pass for a first and self-evident Principle. Something therefore ought to be alledg'd in Support of a Point, which the Generality of Mankind will be very apt to question.

Now, what is alledg'd by our Author to this Purpose, is This; "If God hath given Mankind a Law, he must in like Manner have given them sufficient Means of knowing it; He would otherwise have defeated his own Intent in giving it." p. 4. The Consequence I allow; and that for the Reason immediately subjoin'd, that "a Law as far as it is unintelligible ceases to be a Law." The Gentleman's Error therefore lies in This: He first supposes a certain Law given; and then proper Means afforded for discovering this Law; whereas, in Truth, *To give a Law; To promulge it; or To afford Means of knowing it,* do signify one and the same Thing. What we are capable of discovering to be fit and reasonable; and consequently, to be the Will of God, is to us a Law: What we cannot so discover, is to us no Law: And if we cannot, in the mere Use

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of Reason, discover every thing which is founded in the real Truth and Nature of Things, then a perfect Collection of that Kind, is not the Law of Nature. The Argument therefore, which our Author here produces, amounts to nothing: It leaves the Point just as it found it: And we must try, from other Considerations, whether Men have really sufficient natural Abilities, and Opportunities to discover every thing which is founded in Nature.

The same kind of Reasoning, which I have noted above, occurs again, p. 5. I shall beg Leave to transcribe the whole Passage, because I may find Occasion of Advantage from a particular Sentence; in which, (though he intended it as a Guard,) he hath suggested something, not very consistent either with his general Design, or the particular Argument he is there representing. "If, saith he, God never intended Mankind should  
 "at any time be without a Religion, or have  
 "false Religions; and there be but One true  
 "Religion, which all Men have been ever  
 "bound to believe and profess; I cannot  
 "see any Heterodoxy in affirming, that the  
 "Means to effect this End of infinite Wis-  
 "dom must be as universal and extensive as  
 "the End itself; Or, that all Men, at all  
 "Times, must have had sufficient Means to  
 "discover whatever God design'd They should  
 "know and practise. *I do not mean by this, that*  
 "all

*\* See my note on this passage  
 in folio 242*

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REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 23

*"all should have equal Knowledge, but that  
"all should have what is sufficient for the Cir-  
"cumstances they are in."* The Argument  
carry'd on in this Passage is the same with  
that insisted on just before, tho' our Author  
hath thought fit to give it a Turn somewhat  
different in the Expression. In the former  
Way of Representation, he supposes a Law  
actually given; and then infers, that God  
must have given sufficient Means of knowing  
it. Here he supposes, that God always in-  
tended Men should have some Religion;  
which Religion he farther supposes can be  
but One; from hence likewise he infers, that  
all Men, at all Times, must have had suffi-  
cient Means to discover it.

*To give a Law; — To give a Religion;*  
and *To intend Men should have a Religion,* are  
Expressions which must be interpreted in  
one and the same Sense. And the Law, or  
Religion which this Author affirms God gave  
Men, and intended they should have, is re-  
presented by him as absolutely perfect, and  
containing under it every thing which is  
founded in the Reason and Nature of Things.  
He concludes from hence, If infinite Wis-  
dom hath appointed this End, then the  
Means to effect it must be as universal as the  
End itself.

I have remark'd on this Argument already;  
and therefore shall only observe farther, that  
the following Passage, which is intended by

this Gentleman as a Guard to save himself, en-  
 tirely destroys the Design he is upon, and the  
 Argument he hath produc'd, "I do not, saith  
 "he, mean by this, That all should have  
 "equal Knowledge; but that all should  
 "have sufficient for the Circumstances they  
 "are in." But, by this Gentleman's Leave,  
 if God gave Men a Religion, or intended  
 they shou'd have a Religion; if this Religion  
 contains under it every thing which is founded  
 in the Reason and Nature of Things; and, if all  
 Men, at all Times, must have sufficient Means  
 of discovering this Religion; — They must  
 likewise have sufficient Means of discovering  
 every thing which is founded in the Nature  
 and Reason of Things. It follows from  
 hence, that all Men must have the Means  
 and Opportunities of *equal Knowledge*; I do  
 not say, They must have equal Knowledge,  
 but only the *Means* of it; which Means they  
 may, if they please, neglect. It is in this  
 Sense our Author ought to be understood,  
 tho' he hath express'd himself in an improper  
 Manner. "All Men, saith he, must have  
 "*sufficient Means* to discover whatever God  
 "design'd, &c. —" Then it follows, — "I  
 "don't mean that all should have *equal*  
 "*Knowledge*, [the Course of his Argument  
 requires it should be *the Means of equal*  
 "*Knowledge*,] but that all should have suffi-  
 "cient for the Circumstances they are in."  
 How consistent this is with the Argument  
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he is here upon, The Gentleman is concern'd to shew.

Hitherto I have observ'd, that we neither are, nor possibly can be oblig'd to any thing, for the Knowledge of which we want either Abilities, or Opportunity; and consequently, That the Law, or Religion of Nature, taken in that Sense, in which it ought to be understood in the present Debate, must signify Such a System, as Man may, in the due Use of his natural Faculties, discover. Whether These will reach to every Thing founded in the real Nature and Reason of Things, comes now to be consider'd more distinctly.

Our Author endeavours to discover what is founded in the Nature and Reason of Things, by considering — The Existence, and Perfections of God; — The Nature, and Imperfections of ourselves; — and, The Relation we stand in to God, and our Fellow-Creatures. [See Chapter 2.] To which he ought to have added one Thing farther, viz. The Nature of all other Beings with which we have any Concern, and from the Use and Application of which we are capable of receiving any considerable Advantage, or Prejudice; For, without this, we shall be liable to do or omit a great Number of Things of the most important Consequence both to ourselves and others.

And, first, for the Existence and Perfections of God; It is confess'd on all Hands that

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that some Light may be had here. It may be prov'd, That there must have been a First, Independent, Eternal Principle ; — That This Being is every where ; — knows every thing ; — is absolutely Powerful, Wise, Just, Good, and the like. Things of this Kind may be discover'd : And it may be shewn likewise, That this first Being must be possess'd of every real Perfection, in all the Degrees of it which are possible. Yet, however certain it be in the general, that every real Perfection must necessarily belong to God, I question very much whether we are able to discover distinctly what all these Perfections are. I question whether it can be safely affirm'd, That as the before-mention'd Attributes, and the like, do belong to God, so likewise that there are none others beside These, which belong to him. To know This we must have a full and comprehensive View of all Perfection ; — of every thing which can deserve that Character. But if we fail here, as we are deficient in our Knowledge of the Nature of Things, so must we likewise be of their several Results and Consequences ; and therefore shall be unable, by our Reason, to discover every thing that is founded in the Natures and Reasons of Things.

Again ; As to those Perfections which may be prov'd to belong to God, I doubt much whether we have any adequate and compleat



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compleat Ideas of them. This perhaps will readily be allow'd me with regard to his natural Perfections: And if it be disputed in reference to those which are of a Moral Kind, I would only desire to observe, that however fully we may be suppos'd to understand what these Attributes mean, yet there must be several other Things likewise discover'd in order to know How they will be exercis'd on emergent Occasions. Thus, supposing it strictly demonstrable that God is Just and Good; and that the full Import of these Attributes is likewise known; yet we must know what is, in every Case, Just and Good, before we can determine in what Manner God must act or conduct himself; and consequently, what may be most fitting for Creatures to expect, or do, on such Occasions. Here therefore we are incompetent Judges of Matters founded on the Natures and Reasons of Things.

Once more; We do, or may know, That there is a God; and that This God can be but One. There is no Manner of Contradiction in supposing some such Distinctions in the Divine Nature as are analogous to personal Distinctions amongst Men: And yet, it cannot be prov'd, from any Principles of Human Reason, that such Distinctions do really subsist. Now if such do subsist in Fact; — and each Person, so subsisting, hath different Offices, and bears a different Relation to Mankind, then it is apparent there will be something in the Divine

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*negativ.* Divine Nature undiscoverable by Human Reason ; — something, which as soon as known, may prove the Foundation of particular and special Duties. " This is what The Christian Religion teaches ; and in Consequence of This, Things are required in this Dispensation, which could not be learnt from the mere Reasonings of our own Minds about them.

The next Thing which our Author considers, is, The Nature and Imperfections of ourselves. Here it might be expected we should have a full View of Matters ; for, what can be thoroughly known by us, if we do not know ourselves ? And yet perhaps a great Number of Questions may be started, of which no tolerable Solution can be given ; and Questions too, from the Determination of which no small Advantage might arise.

To explain myself a little here ; I will consider Man in these Two Respects, *viz.* as an Animal endu'd with Sense and Perception ; and likewise as endu'd with a Principle of Reason. The former he enjoys in common with Brutes, but the latter sets him above them, and gives him his proper Character and Distinction.

In reference to both these it must be allow'd, that each Man for himself is conscious of what happens to him, or passes within him ; and we are apt to presume, that as the general Frame and Make of human Kind is the same, so the same Pleasures or Pains arise

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to different Men from the same Impressions of external Objects; — That they have equal Capacity of Reason and Knowledge; and enjoy or suffer<sup>d</sup> alike from the same Sentiments of Things. Yet it is most certain that there is a vast Difference between Men in these several Respects; and such, as no Person in the World can adjust and settle. The same Things, to different Persons, may prove either agreeable, or disagreeable, *i. e.* Good, or Evil: And as we are not entirely acquainted with these Particulars, so we cannot exactly know How to regulate our own Behaviour towards them.

General Rules may be laid down, *viz.* To do as much Good as we can, — and as little Mischief as possible: Yet still, for want of knowing what is the real State and Condition of each particular Person, we may err in the Application of these general Rules; and become unavoidably ignorant of several Matters, which have a real Ground in the Natures and Reasons of Things.

I have observ'd before, that Men, notwithstanding they are Reasonable Beings, are yet possess'd of various Degrees of Reason. And tho' we are conscious of our own personal Powers or Attainments, yet we are far from knowing how Matters really stand with other Men. Here is another Source of Difficulties. We cannot, in many Instances, determine What Men ought, or ought not

to do; or how far they are either to be commended, or censur'd. In many Points they must be left to an higher Judge; because the true State of Matters is entirely beyond our Reach.

Once more; A considerable Part of Men's real Characters will arise either from their private Conduct, or from that which passes within their own Minds; and consequently, it is impossible to say, in many Instances, who is really a Good, or a Bad Man. In such Cases as these we are concern'd to use the best Light we have, and to act accordingly. Yet, if we could see farther into Matters, we should reasonably proceed in a different Way: Different Measures would appear to be proper for us, arising from such Reasons, as in the present State are entirely conceal'd from us.

From considering the Nature and Imperfections of Men, our Author goes on, and mentions another Source of Duty, *viz.* The Relation we stand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures.

The First and Original Relation in which we stand to God, is that of a Creature to his Creator: But This will infer nothing, unless we consider God likewise as exercising a Providence over us; — as noting and observing our Actions; — as prescribing a Rule to them; and exacting an Obedience to it.

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# REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 31

This then is the first thing which arises from our Relation to God, That we pay an unfeign'd Obedience to his Will; but wherein this Will consists, still remains to be enquir'd. To this Purpose then it should be consider'd, that in order to prove a Providence, in the full Sense of the Word, we are oblig'd to evince the several Perfections of the Divine Nature; at least those which relate to us; such as are, Power, Knowledge, Wisdom, Justice, Goodness, Truth. From these it will follow, That we ought to Love him, — to Reverence him, — to Trust in him, — to Worship him, and the like. So far as this, I hope, there will be no Dispute.

But then we should consider likewise, that as God is known to be related to us as a Creator and Preserver, so there may, (for any thing we can affirm to the contrary,) be several other Relations to us which He sustains. He may be related to us as a Redeemer and a Sanctifier. I know these Points are entirely exploded by The Gentleman I am now concern'd with: But it is much easier to laugh at a Doctrine than to refute it. It should be prov'd therefore that the Notions of a Redeemer and a Sanctifier are utterly absurd and contradictory; otherwise these Doctrines may possibly be true. And if we have sufficient external Evidence that they are so, we may claim a Right of assign-  
ing



ing some other Relations of God to us, than those founded in Creation and Preservation.

Let us suppose then, that These Relations do subsist, and see what may be the Consequences arising from them. If it be said, that Duty will be still the same, the Assertion may perhaps be true in a certain Sense. No Duties may arise of a different Kind from those deducible from Creation and Preservation. Yet it will be apparent at first Sight, that here will be new Enforcements and Recommendations of Duty; and new Reasons for the punctual Performance of them. If these therefore are undiscoverable by mere natural Light, how can it be affirm'd, that we may have a perfect Knowledge of all the Relations in which we stand to God; and of all that is founded in the Nature and Reason of Things?

(Next to the Relations in which we stand to God, we should consider Those which subsist between us and our Fellow-Creatures. Here I am apt to think our Author hath consider'd Matters very imperfectly: For, by *Fellow-Creatures* he seems to mean no more than Human Kind in general; — none but those of the same Rank and Order with ourselves. This may appear pretty plainly from his Course of Reasoning in the Second Chapter. Now, however the Relation in which we stand either to Mankind in general, or to single Persons in particular, should be sufficient

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cient to direct us to the social Duties in general, yet certainly these Duties will not take in every thing which hath a Foundation in the Nature and Reason of Things. There may be several other Matters fit and proper to be done, or avoided; and for which there may be very important Reasons assignable, however remote from common Notice and Observation.

We should consider ourselves not only as Individuals of a certain Species or Members of a Society, but likewise as Parts of a whole System; and as Beings capable of doing Things either serviceable or inconvenient to the Whole, or any particular Branches of it. But do we really know all the several Relations in which we stand to every sensible or intelligent Creature? Can we tell how far our Actions may affect them; and assign *all* the Reasons which have a Foundation in the Nature of Things, either for, or against a particular Behaviour? Is it not possible therefore, that some Matters may appear, in our Views of Things, as slight and inconsiderable, which are yet of great Moment to the Good and Advantage of the Whole?

Let us only reflect how difficult it is for private Persons, and those who are unexperienc'd in the Greater Affairs of Life, to account for all the Measures of Conduct which a Wise and Able Politician may find it necessary to enter into. These are all built on

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the several Relations subsisting either between different States, or the particular Parts of the same State. Were every thing of this kind clear and apparent, it would be more easy to judge concerning a right or wrong Administration. But if these Things are so difficult to be judg'd of; and the narrow Schemes of Human Policy are so far beyond the Reach of most Men, How shall we determine concerning the Whole System of Nature? How shall we judge concerning God's Proceedings, and the Administrations of Providence? And how shall we be certain, from our own weak Reason, what is in every respect fit and proper to be done by us?

To what hath been suggested by this Gentleman as necessary and sufficient to discover all that is founded in the Reason of Things, I shall crave Leave to add One Thing farther, since he hath been pleas'd to overlook it: And I cannot but think it of considerable Moment, since the general Rules deducible from the foregoing Considerations, will be frequently unserviceable without it. I mean, the Nature and Powers of all those several Beings by which we are surrounded, and with which we have any manner of Concern. Here then a very large Field opens. It takes in a considerable Part of Nature: For without a deep Knowledge in these Things, we shall be incapable of discerning, on numberless Occasions, What is really fit

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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 35

to be done, either with respect to ourselves or others.

Be these general Rules therefore, in reference to ourselves, however perfectly known, *viz.* That we ought to do nothing which will Destroy Life, — Prejudice Health, — Impair the Reason, — Heighten the Passions, and the like; yet still, before they can serve us, we must know What particular kinds of Actions or Omissions will contribute to these several Ends: And, in order to This, we must know What are the Natures and Powers of those several Beings with which we have any manner of Concern; because, otherwise, by an undue Application of them, we may really produce the Evils we would avoid.

Thus again, with respect to our Neighbours; It may be known with Certainty enough, that we ought to perform to them all the Offices of Justice and Humanity; — That we ought neither to do them any unnecessary Prejudice, nor to decline any fair Opportunities of serving them. These Things will arise from considering, that as we are Creatures of the same Kind, so we are equally the Subjects of the same Divine Care and Providence. Notwithstanding this, many other Things must likewise be known in order to discover how it will be fit to act on every emergent Occasion. We must know What will prejudice or serve our Neighbour;

bour ; and, for this Purpose, What Influence, whether good or bad, the Use and Application of natural Things, may, in certain Circumstances, have on them.

It is true, indeed, Observation and Experience will teach us somewhat here, without much Insight into natural Science : But then, it should be noted at the same Time, that this will carry us no farther than the grosser and more obvious Appearances. Things which operate with Dispatch, and to a Degree immediately perceivable, can scarce escape our Notice. But, what if their Influences should be remote, and the Working slow and gradual ? In such Cases, Experience will do little Service : We shall know scarce any thing at all ; and consequently, be liable, on numberless Occasions, to be deceiv'd into a Conduct, which upon fuller Information we might, and would have avoided.

The Result is This ; Since Nothing can be properly to us a Law, which is by us undiscoverable ; Since there are many Things, even in those Sources of Duty laid down by this Author, undiscoverable by us ; Since we are far from knowing all the Natures of Things,—all the several Relations they have to one another, and consequently, all that is founded in, and must result from these Considerations, were Matters fully laid open to us ; it follows, that The Law or Religion of Nature cannot include every thing which

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which is founded in the Nature and Reason of Things.

Before I proceed farther, it will be proper to support the foregoing Reasonings by solving an Objection which we meet with, *p.* 26. Our Author there argues for the Sufficiency of Human Reason to discover every thing which is fit and proper to be done ; and the Argument is drawn from considering the End for which the Faculty of Reason was given us. " The End, saith he, for which God " hath given us Reason, is, to compare " Things, and the Relation they stand in to " each other ; and from thence to judge of " the Fitness and Unfitness of Actions. And " could not our Reason judge soundly in " All such Matters, it could not have answer'd the End for which infinite Wisdom and Goodness bestow'd that excellent " Gift."

All Arguments alledg'd to prove that a Thing really is, which in Fact is not, must be vain Presumptions. And therefore, if it shall appear, from what hath been already observ'd, that Human Reason cannot discover all the Fitness of Things ; what is now advanc'd by this Gentleman must be groundless and inconclusive.

Were his Reasoning of any Force, it would prove abundantly too much. It would equally prove, that Human Reason is commensurate to all Truth ; For Reason was



given us to discover Truth ; And therefore, (to use his own Words) " If it could not judge soundly in all such Matters, it could not answer the End for which God bestow'd it on us." To which may be added, that all Men, on this Foot of arguing, must necessarily have equal Degrees of Reason,—or equal Capacities to discover all Truth. For, as all Men have Reason, so the End of bestowing that Faculty on them must be the same in all : Every Man therefore must be capable of discovering all Truth ; and consequently, all Men must have equal intellectual Capacities ; unless it may be affirm'd, that whilst every Man is capable of discovering all Truth, some are capable of discovering more than all.

The real State of the Case seems to be This ; Whatever those good Purposes are for which the Reason we enjoy will serve, These were the Ends for which God bestow'd it on us ; By knowing therefore how far our Reason, consider'd as a Means, will carry us, we may know how extensive the End itself must be : For we may be sure that an all-wise Being cannot propose an End impossible to be obtain'd. If therefore our Reason cannot lead us into the Discovery of every Truth, nor of all the real Fitnesses of Things, it is apparent, that all Matters of this kind were not design'd to be discover'd by our Reason. The Principle on which our Author builds,

builds, *viz.* "That Reason was given us  
"to discover the Fitness or Unfitness of  
"Actions," if it be understood in an univer-  
sal Sense, is wrong; — if in a limited one,  
his Conclusion fails: And his great Error  
lies in This, that his Inference is more exten-  
sive than his Premises. The one being true  
only in a limited Sense, the other cannot be  
true in an universal one.

But besides that the Notion of the Law or  
Religion of Nature, which this Gentleman  
pursues, is entirely wrong, as apply'd by  
him in the present Debate, we may observe  
farther, that it will by no means come up  
to his Purpose, nor support the Conclusions  
he deduces from it.

His general Purpose, is to shew, That a  
Revelation is perfectly needless and super-  
fluous; and his Method of proving it is This;  
That the Religion of Nature is every way  
sufficient, and absolutely perfect. But how  
does This appear? — We shall see imme-  
diately: This Religion, says he, contains  
under it every Thing which is founded in  
the Nature and Reasons of Things: It must  
therefore be absolutely perfect, and incapable  
either of receiving Addition, or admitting  
Diminution. Well: all this might be sup-  
pos'd, and yet this all-perfect Religion be of  
little Service to us. For, what if the Circum-  
stances of Mankind should be such, as to dis-  
able them from discovering what this Reli-

gion of Nature is ! Of This our Gentleman was aware ; and he endeavours to obviate it by observing, That this Religion of Nature was originally given by God to every Man ; — That every Man must therefore be enabled to know it perfectly ; and of Consequence, Nothing remains to be done by Revelation which was not as effectually secured without it.

I shall say nothing here concerning the absolute Perfection and Immutability of this Law of Nature. These are Heads which shall be distinctly consider'd hereafter. At present I shall observe, upon Supposition that these extraordinary Assertions were true, (which yet I am so far from admitting, that I shall endeavour to disprove them in another Place); — I say, upon this very Supposition, it will by no Means follow that a Revelation is useless and superfluous.

I shall assign Two Reasons for this Purpose ;

1. Because, by laying before Men in One View a regular System of Religious Truths and Precepts, it must very much assist Men in Enquiries of this Nature, and make such Discoveries abundantly more easy to them.

2. Because, the Authority by which such a Revelation is made, will engage their Attention ; and more effectually impress upon their Minds a Sense of these Things, than

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the mere Workings of their own Thoughts about them could possibly do.

I do here suppose the utmost which our Author himself contends for, *viz.* That Men are furnish'd with natural Powers sufficient for the Discovery of every Thing which is founded in the Nature and Reason of Things: Yet still Experience shews us, that Men do not actually, and in Fact, know every thing which might possibly have been discover'd by them. There is a great deal of Difference between the mere Power of Reasoning, and the Exercise of this Power: And even when it is exercised in some measure, the Success of Men's Enquiries will be different in proportion to the Ways and Methods in which they make them. From hence arises the Necessity of Teaching and Instruction; — the Expediency and Usefulness, I mean: For however strong Men's natural Parts may be, they must be rightly directed in order to attain their End. Otherwise, by making a wrong Choice of Principles from which to argue, they may be led off from their Point; and the Matter intended to receive a Decision be left as much in the Dark as ever.

Let us therefore consider a Divine Revelation none otherwise than as a noble Means of Instruction. Even in This View its Usefulness will appear to Advantage. For, by proposing a just Scheme both of Doctrines and Precepts, Men's Enquiries will be pointed right:

right: They will see and know how to direct their Aims: And consequently, must attain their End with much more Ease, than if they had been left to their own unassisted Reason.

All this will be confess'd in reference to other Matters. A Skill in other Arts and Sciences is obtain'd with much more Readiness by consulting judicious Systems already fram'd, than by labouring to make the full Discovery ourselves. I do not here take Notice, that many Persons are capable of apprehending a Thing already invented, who are utterly incapable of making the Discovery by their own Force of Thought: (For these two Things require very different Talents): This, I say, shall be left out of the Question here. Be Men furnish'd with Abilities as well to invent for themselves, as to apprehend what is offer'd by others: Notwithstanding this, Invention itself may be forwarded and assisted; and the Knowledge of Truth be attained with much greater Facility and Dispatch when regularly pointed out to them, than if they had never heard, or thought of it before.

And indeed, on any other Foot than this, those worthy Persons, who have labour'd in the Pursuit of Knowledge, have labour'd only for themselves. If their Discoveries have been of no Use to others, they might as well have kept them secret; and have left

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the rest of the World to trace out such Matters in their own Way. But if this be really the Case with regard to other Arts, why may not like Advantages arise in the Discovery of Religion, from setting before Men a just and proper Scheme of it? And if this be once allow'd, then a Revelation for this Purpose neither is, nor can be useless.

If it be said here, that every thing this way may be as well perform'd by the Labours of Men, who are concern'd to teach and instruct their Fellow-Creatures; and that mere Instruction, whether it come from God or Man, will amount to much the same, and produce the same Effects; — If this, I say, be alledg'd, we must observe a vast Difference between them. Divine Instruction, if known to be such, will carry with it much greater Authority, and claim Attention in a higher Degree than any Institution merely human can pretend to. Those who believe it will think themselves concern'd to receive it with Reverence, and to study it with Diligence. The necessary and essential Dependance of The Creature on The Creator will enforce this on them. But can the like be pleaded in Behalf of any mere human Instruction, how wise and excellent soever it may be in itself! Are not Men, in such Cases, apt to reflect, That no one Man, merely as such, hath any Authority to dictate or prescribe to others? — That they have therefore a Liberty to  
study



study or neglect his Instructions, as they please? In consequence of which, they will be apt to remit their Labours, and to give off, upon the first Discouragement of Difficulty in the Enquiry. This, surely, is no small Advantage, that the Things propos'd will recommend themselves to our Consideration in proportion to the Weight and Authority of the Proposer.

Over and above this it may be added farther, That the Religious Knowledge gain'd this way, will be embrac'd more steadily; and the Sense of these Things will become more vigorous and lively. Whatever Advantages can arise from mere rational Deduction, are all equally enjoy'd by 'That Person, who is instructed by Revelation. He is suppos'd, in the present Case, equally to discern the Fitness and Reason of Things, as being directed to them by the Revelation itself. However, it is remarkable, that habitual Knowledge is not always the Rule of our Actions. If it be enquir'd from whence this arises, we shall easily see, that good Rules, and such as we acknowledge to be so, are apt to be forgotten; — That our Passions blind us, and Temptations lead us astray; and we are by these Means seduc'd into a Behaviour, which in our more serious and thinking Hours we must condemn. To aid this Infirmary, it becomes expedient, that the proper Rules of Conduct should come recommended to us,

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and enforc'd upon us by something more than the mere Reasons of Things themselves;— by something which shall fix and imprint them deep upon our Minds; and make them recur to us as often as fit Occasions and Opportunities require. This is most effectually done by having them deliver'd and confirm'd to us as the express Will of God; by having them propos'd, not merely as the prudent Advices of Wise Men, but the firm Decrees of The Almighty. This, if any thing, will fix our Attention: And where this fails, all other Methods will be vain.

I might carry on this Point much farther, and support it by many other Reflections; from whence The Expediency of a Revelation may appear, as well to make the Knowledge of a moral Rule more easy, more perfect and more general, as to enforce it more strongly on the Consciences and Lives of Men. But I retreat at present, since these are Matters which belong more properly to another Part of my Design. Thus much however is not amiss to have been hinted here; that whilst I have been endeavouring to prove this Author's Notion of the Religion of Nature, as applied by him, to be wrong, it may appear at the same Time that 'tis useless and unserviceable to those Purposes for which He advances it.

Hitherto I have consider'd the Law or Religion of Nature, as it is us'd to signify a per-

perfect Collection of all those Doctrines and Precepts, which have a real Foundation in the Truth and Reason of Things; and have endeavour'd to shew, that, taken in this Sense, it cannot, properly speaking, be to us a Law or Religion. I shall now consider it in another View, *viz.* as it implies such a Collection only, as may be discover'd by us in the Use of our proper Faculties; such a one, as we are able to make out in the Use of those Means and Opportunities we enjoy. In this Sense only it can be properly to us a Law; because, in this Sense only it can oblige: For, it is impossible we should be oblig'd to any thing we are incapable of knowing.

For the more distinct Explication of this Notion, the general Truth of which is clear and certain enough, it should be observed, that as the Law of Nature is such a Collection, &c. as we are capable of making in the due Use and Exercise of Reason, so the State and Condition of human Reason ought to be thoroughly consider'd by us.

A Distinction therefore should be made between Reason as it subsisted in its most perfect State, whilst Man lived in a State of Innocence, and as it now subsists in the present corrupt Condition of human Nature. For, no Conclusions can be made from the Powers of Reason in the one Case, to the like Powers of it in the other.

This,



This, I think, is certain. But yet I shall not insist on it at present; because our Author denies all Ground and Foundation for this Distinction; and maintains, that human Nature is still in the very same Condition, in which it was at first created. [*Vid.* p. 375.] I shall therefore consider human Reason as it now really and in Fact subsists.

In the next place, we should distinguish between human Reason as it is dispers'd thro' all human Kind, and as it subsists separately in particular Persons. If it be consider'd in the former Sense, Nothing is above human Reason, which is capable of being discover'd by the particular Reason of any particular Man, or the joint Reason of all Men. In this View human Reason may master every thing, which either hath been, or may be master'd by Man; which either hath been discover'd by the former Learned, or may be discover'd by the future Learned.

To see the better how far this concerns our present Purpose, we must observe, that no One Man, even of the strongest Parts, and under the most advantageous Circumstances, ever yet exhausted any Art or Science. Its several Branches have been variously improv'd by different Men; and successive Writers have added something to the Stock already gather'd in by those who have gone before them. What is observable in other Arts is especially to be remark'd in Matters of Morality.

Morality. This likewise hath gradually improv'd; but with This Difference however, that sometimes those who have improv'd, in certain Particulars, on the preceding Scheme, have yet corrupted it in others: And however valuable a Collection may possibly be made from the Writings of several Authors, yet no compleat and unexceptionable System hath been offer'd the World by any One of them.

We may complain therefore with great Justice of our Adversaries on this Head. They argue from what human Reason can do, consider'd as 'tis dispers'd thro' all human Kind; and conclude for a like Power, as it subsists in particular Men: — Just as reasonably as it would be to insist, that whatever Effects can be produc'd by the joint Force of all Men, the same may be produc'd by the single Power of any.

Upon Supposition therefore that a perfect Scheme of Moral Rules might be gather'd from the Writings of the several Philosophers; and consequently, was not absolutely undiscoverable by mere human Reason, (which yet can never be prov'd) still, before this can be of Service to the Gentleman I am now debating with, he must prove these Two Points;

1. That whatsoever was discoverable by Mankind gradually, and in a long Course of Years, was equally discoverable at once.

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For, if it were not discoverable at once, then a Time may be assign'd when certain Moral Points were not at all discoverable; and consequently, that human Reason hath not, at all Times, been able to master every Moral Truth and Precept.

He must prove likewise, 2dly, That whatsoever is discoverable by all collectively taken, is discoverable by every one separately consider'd; or, at least, that whatsoever is once discover'd by some, is comprehensible by all. But both these Points are false in Fact; and so obviously false, that no thinking Person can mistake about them. There is not only an Incapacity in single Persons to discover what may easily be found out by the united Labours of all; but there is likewise a vast Difference between Men in point of Natural Parts and Abilities. And where these are really alike, there is yet a great Difference as to the Opportunities of using them. Upon these Accounts it is seen every Day, That however desirous of Knowledge and Improvement different Men may be, yet they are incapable of the same Attainments; some ever exceeding others in proportion to the Degrees of their natural Talents, and the Occasions they have of using them.

To go on; Human Reason, as it subsists separately in every particular Person, may  
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likewise be consider'd, Either as it is enjoy'd by Men under the most advantageous Circumstances; or else, as it is possess'd under the worst; or, Lastly, as it is ordinarily seen in the Bulk and Generality of Mankind.

The Lord Bishop of *London* hath distinctly consider'd it in the Two former Views; and shewn, with Great Accuracy, what have been the several Conclusions, as well of the Wisest and most Learned, as of the Weakest and most Ignorant. His Lordship hath prov'd, to the great Advantage of our Cause, that even The Philosophers, who carry'd Matters of a Religious or Moral Nature to a great Heighth, have yet in several Particulars been ignorant, uncertain, or mistaken. They must therefore be unfit to be the absolute Directors of other Men, since they were so liable to err themselves.

But if the very wisest have err'd here, we shall be less surpris'd at the Grossness of the rude and barbarous. These being Strangers to all the Improvements of Education and Art, can go but a little way in the Discovery of Truth;—are incapable of directing or controuling their Passions in any tolerable Degree. And Experience itself shews, that as their Ignorance is extreme, so their Opinions and Practices in religious Matters are monstrous.

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# REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. §1

Here we shall be told, That the State and Condition of human Reason ought not to be judg'd of from the Capacities of the Meanest Persons, and these likewise labouring under the greatest Disadvantages. True: And therefore, as we must not judge concerning the Reason of Philosophers by the Reason of Barbarians, so neither must we measure the Reason of Barbarians by that of Philosophers. This is the very thing which I complain of in our Adversaries. They are apt to infer from the noble Discoveries which have been made by the deepest Thinkers, that the same may be made by every One else, who will give himself the Pains of making them. Whereas the real Truth is, a great Number of Men are not only incapable of making these Discoveries themselves, but of apprehending the Reasons on which they are built when discover'd by others, and fairly laid before them. Nothing therefore can be more extravagant than to argue from the Capacities of the One, to the like or equal Abilities in the other.

After all, in order to judge concerning the general Compass of human Reason, I shall consider it neither in its best, nor yet in its worst View: I shall take it as it subsists in the Bulk and Generality of Mankind; and see how far it may and will carry Men.

Here then it should be consider'd, that the greatest Part of the World have always

been, and ever will be oblig'd to act a Part in low Life: in which, (tho' we should suppose the natural Capacities of Mankind to be originally equal,) they cannot receive the Advantage of a proper Education in the Beginning; Nor have they Time to pursue Matters of Reasoning very far, how desirous soever they may be of doing it. In things which fall under common Observation, (such as are the ordinary Arts of Life,) they may shew Sagacity enough. Yet, even here we shall find, for the most Part, that their Skill is restrain'd to those Matters which lie within their proper Business. Different Men excel in different Ways; But in Matters out of the common Road of Thinking they seem as much at a Loss, as tho' they were entirely without any Power of Reasoning at all about them.

What hath been observ'd concerning the several Arts of Life, towards which Men have not been us'd to direct their Thoughts, will appear more evidently in Matters which depend on abstract Reasoning. Philosophy is not born with a Man, but learnt by much Pains and Application. To make a Figure this way he must devote himself almost entirely to it;—must view things in every Point of Light; and determine upon a long Comparison of one Thing with another.

Yet, Morality, it seems, may presently be discover'd. Every thing in all Circumstances

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fit to be done, may be seen with Ease : And no Man can need Instruction, since the Means of Knowledge are entirely within himself. Were This the Case, (as the Gentleman I am now concern'd with contends,) one might expect that the noblest Remains of The antient Philosophers might be equall'd by every Day-Labourer. But doth Fact answer these Expectations? Do we find that the Generality of Men are such notable Reasoners in Moral Matters;—or, that every thing lies so clear before them? The Thing is in its own Nature impossible. As they are not train'd up to Enquiries of this Nature, so neither have they Leisure nor Opportunities for pursuing them: And we might as well expect that, in such Circumstances as these, they should gain an exact Skill in Natural Philosophy as Moral.

Upon the whole; Men, consider'd in these different Views, have different Capacities and Opportunities of Knowledge; in proportion to which their several Schemes of Moral Conduct must be various. And as That only is to them a Law, which is by them discoverable, it follows, that this Law itself, as it regards different Men, must be various; — by no means One and the Same to all; but of a greater or less Extent, as they are capable of making greater or less Discoveries in Moral Science. In short, it is Such a Collection of Moral Rules, as each

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Person, according to the Circumstances he is plac'd in, is capable of making for himself.

Thus far I have endeavour'd to State the Law or Religion of Nature, and to shew What ought to be understood by the Term. I am concern'd, in the next place, to enquire, From whence the Obligation to observe this Law arises. And to this I am led, not only because The Gentleman, whose Performance is now before me, speaks variously on the Point, and assigns different Grounds, as he hath different Purposes to serve by it; but likewise, because some other Matters to be insisted on hereafter, may be influenc'd by a right Determination here.

It must be own'd that our Author for the most part speaks of The Law or Religion of Nature as *The Will of God*; — as *God's Will internally reveal'd*; — as *a Law given us by God*. And one Argument whereby he would prove it to be an absolutely perfect Law, is This; “Because it comes from a Being of absolute Wisdom and Perfection.” According to these Passages Obligation must be deriv'd from the Divine Will; — The Will of That Being who is represented as The Cause and Author of this Law.

Yet, in other Places he states the Point otherwise; and derives Obligation from the Nature and Reason of Things themselves. Thus he tells us, “The eternal Reason of Things

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# REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 55

" Things is the supreme Obligation. " [p. 367.] And, in another place, he speaks of " Man's being good by the Original Obligation of the Moral Fitness of Things, " in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God. " p. 368. He does not say, in *Obedience* to the perfect Will of God, but in *Imitation* of it. This Passage seems to intimate that God himself is properly oblig'd by the Moral Fitness of Things; and, that whilst we are good by this Original Obligation, we imitate God, who is likewise govern'd by the same Original Obligation.

I know several Worthy and Good Men have often express'd themselves in such a manner, as tho' they imagin'd Obligation did arise from the abstract Natures and Fitnesses of Things. They have spoken of Obligation as antecedent to the Will of God, at least in order of Conception; and sometimes of God himself as the Subject of Obligation. These seem to be inaccurate Expressions: And I hope I shall be pardon'd, if I represent the Reasons of my Disagreement with them on this Head.

It is allow'd readily, that as there are several Relations subsisting between Men and other Beings, so those Kinds of acting which are truly expressive of these Relations may be said, in some Sense, to be fit, proper, and reasonable. And as there are certain



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Ends fuitable to our Nature, so those Actions which are proper to obtain these Ends, may on that account be said to have a Fitness in them. By Fitness therefore I do understand, Either the Relation of a Sign to the thing signified by that Sign; — or, of a Means to the End obtainable by that Means.

It may be allow'd farther, That such Fitnesses as these are, at least in order of Conception, antecedent to the Will of God; I mean the Will of God, as it relates to the Conduct and Behaviour of his Creatures. For, if God requires a certain Conduct because it is fit, it is evident, that a Fitness it had antecedent to the Command; and on which the Command itself is built: Otherwise, God would not command it, because it is fit, but it must Therefore alone be fit, because God commands it. This, I must confess, is attended with Difficulties I know not how to master.

Yet still I do by no means maintain, that these Fitnesses are absolutely before all Will of God, and entirely independent on it. Here then we must distinguish between the Will of God, as it regards the Order and Constitution of Things, and the same Will, as it regards the Actions and Conduct of his Creatures. The Fitness of Things must be subsequent to the Will of God, if we understand his Will in the former Sense of the Expression; For Things are therefore fit, because

God

God hath constituted Nature in such a manner as to make them so: But then it must precede God's Will, when understood in the latter Sense; since God therefore wills Things, because they are fit and proper.

But however this be, yet I cannot see how Obligation, strictly so call'd, arises from the mere Fitness of Things, whether we understand by it the Suitableness of certain Actions to the several Relations in which we stand, as being truly expressive of them; or else, their being conducive as Means to those good Ends they are naturally capable of producing.

If we understand Fitness in the former Sense, it falls in with Mr. *Woollaston's* Notion of *Truth*; and therefore we must enquire what Obligations Men are under, to Truth, merely as such, whether it be express'd by Words or Actions.

It is reasonable, you will say, for a reasonable Being to conform to Truth, and absurd to do the contrary. Well: But then another Question arises, *viz.* What Obligation is a reasonable Being under to speak or act thus reasonably, supposing that a Conformity to Truth is in all Cases reasonable? There can be no Obligation, where there is no kind of Motive to act or to forbear. Mere Reason may indeed direct and shew the Way; but something else is necessary in order to induce and influence us.

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To this possibly it will be reply'd, that a reasonable Being, whilst he attends to Reason, cannot but take a Pleasure in acting according to it, and feel a Pain in deviating from it; and consequently, that the Obligation to act agreeably to these Fitnesses of Things, arises from the Pleasure and Satisfaction which attends this Course, and the Uneasiness and Dissatisfaction which follows the contrary. Be this then the real State of the Case: It will appear from hence, that Fitness, even in the former Sense of the Word, can infer Obligation no farther than it serves as a Means to some farther End; and this leads me on to consider what Obligation arises from Fitness in the latter Sense.

The End which we propose to ourselves, whatever it be, must regard Either the System in general, or some particular Beings in this System, or Ourselves.

Be the End therefore some Good or other relating to the System in general, or some particular Beings in the System; Then this Question will arise, How are we obliged to pursue this Good, or What Motive can we have to do so? If it be said, that the Goodness of the Thing is itself a sufficient Motive, a sufficient Inducement, a sufficient Obligation, — we may ask, — To whom is the Thing propos'd Good? If to others only, it remains to be shewn, How the Good of others can at all affect us, unless we ourselves have some



some Interest or other in their Good: If to the Man, who is concern'd to act, then he pursues it under the Notion of a private and personal Good. He pursues it, Either because his own Interests are some way or other dependent on such a Course; or at least, because he takes a Pleasure in considering the Good which he does to others. On either Supposition, Obligation must at last be founded in a Desire of his own particular Happiness: And the Fitness of Things, so far as it is capable of having any Influence over him, must imply a Suitableness of Things to the promoting, some way or other, his own Happiness.

I have now driven the Point so far as This; There can be no Motive, no Obligation at all to act or to forbear, where our own Good is entirely out of Question. The next Point to be enquir'd into, is This; Whether the mere Satisfaction which may arise from a certain Action, with its Contrary; or else, the mere natural Conduciveness of that Action to a certain Good, with its Contrary, be a sufficient Ground on which to build Moral Obligation; And if the Negative shall appear, we must go somewhat farther in order to discover where to place Obligation, and what it is.

Now there are some Objections, to me insuperable, against building it on Either of these Foundations. If you found it in the mere Satisfaction which arises to the Mind from

from a certain Action, &c. with its Contrary, then Obligation can reach no farther than the Action propos'd is really fitted to produce this Effect. Be it, for instance, an Act of Humanity or Good Nature: On this Supposition a Man is no farther obliged to it, than he is actually possess'd of tender Sentiments towards his Kind. Should he happen to be void of This Taste, This inward Spirit of Benevolence; and find no Pleasure in the Thought of doing good to others, he must be perfectly free, and under no Obligation to do the least Instance of Kindness to his Brethren.

Nay, should it be suppos'd that, by any means whatsoever, he hath contracted a malicious Disposition, and takes any kind of Satisfaction in the Misfortunes or Miseries of others, it will follow from this Principle, that he is oblig'd to do them all the Mischief he may have it in his Power to do. Hence may appear what a Scheme of Virtue can be erected on this Foundation.

Should this Hypothesis be quitted; and should it be affirm'd, That the mere Tendency of an Action to the present natural Good of the Agent, and so *vice versa*, is the proper Ground on which to build Moral Obligation; — Then it must follow, that no Man is oblig'd to do, or omit any Action farther than it hath a real Tendency to promote or hinder his own present natural Good.

No

No Man can be oblig'd to do any Service to another, unless by doing it he promotes his own present Advantage, or lays a Foundation for some future greater Expectations. What must, in this Case, become of Friendship, Love of Country, Humanity, and the like?

It must follow, in the next place, upon the present Supposition, that if a temporal Advantage may be made to a Man's self by Injustice, Unfaithfulness, betraying his Country, or bringing Misery on Mankind, — he is not merely at Liberty to do all these; but strictly and properly oblig'd to it. His own present temporal Good, it seems, requires it; which being, in this way of stating it, the Ground of Obligation, it must likewise be the Measure of it.

I shall go on to add, That as the Notion of the Religion of Nature, consider'd as a Religion, must refer us to God, The Author and Object of it, — so the Notion of The Law of Nature, consider'd as a Law, must refer us to some Superior, The Author of this Law; and from whose Will, directed by Wisdom and Goodness, and supported by Power, all Obligation, strictly and properly so call'd, must be at last deriv'd.

The Notion of Law in general consists in This, That it is the Decree or Command of a Superior. If this be admitted, then The Law of Nature can be no otherwise a Law, than as we conceive it to be the Will and Com-



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Command of That Being, to whom we are naturally subject; and who is able and willing both to reward our Obedience, and to punish our Obstinacy. On any other Foot than This, we shall run ourselves on some of the Difficulties mention'd before, *viz.* Either, There may be a Law, where there is no Obligation; — Or, There may be Obligation where there is no Motive or Inducement; — Or else, Lastly, Men are oblig'd by The Law of Nature to all those Things for which they have some Motive, be the Matter in itself however pernicious to the Good or Safety of others. Were this once admitted, Virtue might be Vice, and Vice Virtue: The Law of Nature would be the most inconsistent thing imaginable: And the very same Persons, upon a little Change of Circumstances, oblig'd to be either Just or Unjust, Merciful or Cruel.

But the real State of the Case is This. There is an All-perfect Being existing, The Author of the Universe; who in like manner exercises a Providence over that World he first created. Because He is All-perfect, He must be absolutely Just and Good; and consequently, must will the Happiness of his Creatures. As He wills their Happiness, He must will the proper Means of it; and therefore, that Men should not only pursue their own real Good by suitable Means, but likewise the Good and Happiness of their Brethren. For, since all Men have the same  
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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 63

Relation to God as Creatures, they must therefore be all of them the Objects of his Care. Should it therefore happen in some Cases, that acting according to his Will, might be inconsistent with a present Interest, yet still Obedience is abundantly secur'd: Because, The same Being who prescribes to us, will reward our Obedience, or punish our Disobedience.

The Law of Nature then is, to us, a Law, because it is, and must be The Will of God, on whom we are absolutely dependent: And our Obligation to conform ourselves to it, is founded on some Prospect we have of a suitable Reward or Punishment.

In the Use of Reason Men are capable of discovering, in some Sort, the Matter of this Law; and the Enforcements by which it properly becomes a Law to us. So far as these are by us discoverable, so far this Law extends, and no farther: So far are Men strictly oblig'd; For it is impossible that the Law should itself subsist where Obligation ceases.

Upon the Whole; Moral Obligation signifies the Necessity we are under, to do or forbear some Action in Obedience to the Command of a Superior, who hath a Right to prescribe to us, with a Power of enforcing his Commands; and from whom, in consequence of this, we must either hope for some Reward or fear some Punishment: And the Obligation to the Law of Nature signifies, the  
Necessity

Necessity we are under of conforming ourselves to those Precepts, which our Reason shews us to be the Will of God; by which Rule God will acquit or condemn, reward or punish us. Unless we consider it in this View, it is to us no Law at all; and carries with it, strictly speaking, no Obligation: But as soon as we regard it in this Light, it becomes not only a Law but a Religion.

After all, I must confess that this last Point I have been considering, is a tender one; and am sensible that I have differ'd from some very worthy Men, whose Affection to the common Cause of Religion must not be question'd. This may create some Prejudices; which will be heighten'd farther by Apprehensions, that the Cause of Natural Religion must suffer by the present Way of treating it. Were This in Truth the Case, I should not only decline this Method, but abhor it; for, certain it is, that Revelation itself cannot subsist, if Natural Religion be destroy'd; which, as it aids and strengthens, it must in like manner presuppose. But let me desire to know Whence these Fears? Is not Natural Religion affected by this Point in the very same manner as Reveal'd? Is not God equally the Author of both? And is not our Obligation to both resolveable into the same common Principle, *viz.* That they are the Will of that Being on whom we must depend absolutely?

The



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The Gentlemen with whom I am now debating, will allow me, that *Religion* must necessarily refer us to God: But then, they will distinguish between Religion and Morality. They will tell us, that as Morality hath a Foundation in the Nature and Reasons of Things, so it derives its Obligation from the very same Principle: And as Fitness is antecedent, in order of Conception, to the Divine Will, Obligation to conform ourselves to this Fitness must be so likewise. In a Word, as Reason, abstracting from any Concern of the Divine Being about our Actions, may point out what is fit and proper, so the same Reason may effectually oblige us to it.

I am by no means fond of differing from any one merely for the Sake of differing: Much less willing should I be, to have unnecessary Debates with Persons concern'd on the same Side of the general Question. And therefore, in order to make my Sentiments on this Head more clear, I shall sum up in a Series of Propositions, what I take to be the real State of the Case.

*Prop. 1.* There is a real and essential Difference between Things; on account of which some Things are fit and proper to be done, others to be omitted.

2. There is in every Man, who hath the use of those Faculties which are proper to his Nature, a Power whereby he discerns, in some  
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Sort, the Difference between certain Actions; in consequence of which he likes and approves some, he dislikes and condemns others. Unless this be admitted, all Foundation of Natural Morality must fail; and there will be little Distinction, as to moral Matters, between Men and Brutes.

3. This moral Discernment is in different Men different: In some more nice and extensive; in others less so. From whence it follows, that a moral Rule, founded only on this moral Discernment, must vary as much as the Discernment itself varies.

4. As all other Faculties are capable of Improvement or Decay, so we may assert the same of this likewise: And tho' I dare not say it is ever totally extinct whilst any Degrees of Understanding remain, yet this must be allow'd, that it may in a great measure be impair'd.

5. Such Actions, as, in consequence of this moral Discernment, are approv'd or condemn'd, must likewise produce a Liking or Esteem of the Agent on the one hand, or a Dislike or Disesteem of him on the other; and this separate from any Consideration of Advantage or Disadvantage arising to Us. On this Foot we are delighted with a Good and Virtuous Character, or abhor its opposite; and this, when by Distance either of Time or Place, it is impossible that our own Interest should be at all affected.

6. Those

6. Those Actions which a Man likes and approves in others, he must much more do so in himself, and so *vice versa*. From whence it follows, that as he esteems and honours others on this account, or disesteems and condemns them; so, for the same Reason, he must be pleas'd and satisfied with himself whilst he acts what he judges right, or concern'd and anxious whilst he does what he reckons wrong. This I take to be a true account of Natural Conscience.

7. It will follow from hence, that this Approbation of what is right, and Disapprobation of its contrary, together with its consequent Satisfaction or Uneasiness, is a natural Motive to pursue the one, and to avoid the other; and if all Hindrances were remov'd, would be sufficient of itself to influence him.

8. But then, as the moral Discernment itself is different in different Persons, on which account they vary much as to their natural Knowledge in moral Matters; so likewise their moral Taste is found to vary greatly. From whence it comes to pass, that different Men are possess'd of greater or less Degrees of Affection for what is right, — with greater or less Degrees of Aversion from what is wrong.

9. The natural Motive therefore, mention'd under the Seventh Article, will have a different Influence over different Men; and whilst



it may possibly be sufficient for some, it may be far from being so for others.

10. For, however it may be suppos'd, that Men would be influenc'd by this Motive in its lowest Degree, were there no Principles subsisting by which it is counter-acted, yet we find in Fact that Men have a great Variety of Passions and Affections. These frequently draw a contrary way; and disappoint the good Effects which might otherwise arise from our moral Discernment and Taste. To which may be added, That some present Advantage is frequently lost, or some present Disadvantage incurr'd by continuing firm to the Rules of Righteousness. It may be thought, that in such Cases as these, Men are concern'd to have some Regard for themselves. And therefore, unless the Pleasure of pursuing what is suppos'd right shall overballance the Inconveniences attending it, there can be no sufficient Motive, on the present Foot, for pursuing it in such Cases.

11. It follows from hence, That this inward Approbation of what is right, &c. with its consequent Satisfaction, &c. must be utterly insufficient to recommend and enforce the uniform Practice of what is term'd Virtuous. And consequently, we must examine somewhat farther into this Point, in order to discover what Necessity lies upon us to adhere invariably to these Rules.

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12. The real Differences of Things known to us by our natural Discernment, will point out to us a Rule of Action, which we cannot but approve so far as we discern it. But then we should observe, that if we go no farther, This will be only a Rule, and not properly a Law. A Rule may subsist without any Supposition of a Superior decreeing it, whereas a Law, strictly speaking, always supposes a Superior.

13. However the inward Satisfaction or Uneasiness which results from Actions suitable or unsuitable to a known Rule, may in many Cases recommend and enforce that Rule, yet This Recommendation or Enforcement is not, strictly speaking, Obligation. A Man may, on numberless Occasions, be induc'd to do what he is not by any means oblig'd to. Obligation doth not signify Inducement of any Kind, whatsoever it be; but That only which arises from The Will of a Superior, who hath a Right and Power of enforcing his Will by Suitable Rewards and Punishments; and from whom, in Consequence of this, we either hope the one, or dread the other.

14. Therefore I assert, that as all Obligation, strictly so call'd, must be deriv'd at last from the Will of God, so without taking God's Will into account there can be no sufficient Enforcement of the general and uniform Practice of what is term'd Virtue.

But perhaps the chief Difference on this Head is verbal, and relates to the Use of these Terms *Law* and *Obligation*. Both these Expressions are sometimes us'd in a more loose and popular Sense, and at other times in one more strict and proper. If the Gentlemen mean by Law, any proper Rule of Action, whether confirm'd by the Will of a Superior or not; and by Obligation, any kind of moral Inducement, whatsoever it be; — This is a Use of the Terms which seems to be too loose, and may possibly give some Occasion of Advantage to our Adversaries. Yet, however this Matter prove, I hope others may be allow'd to use these Terms in a stricter Acceptation without Offence; especially when the Meaning is declar'd, and Guards thrown in against all Inconveniences thought to arise from this Use of them. — But not to quarrel about mere Words, where we see and understand one another: On what hath been observ'd, I think these Reflections may be offer'd, in which, I hope, we shall all agree, whatsoever those Terms may be in which we may chuse to express ourselves.

1. Upon Supposition that Obligation in a certain Sense, arises from the Differences of things perceiv'd by us, and the consequent Approbation or Disapprobation of Actions, &c. yet must it be confess'd, that Obligation likewise arises from the Will of a Superior, who

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who enforces his righteous Commands by the Sanctions of Reward and Punishment.

2. Forasmuch as the mere Approbation or Disapprobation of Actions, together with the consequent Esteem or Disesteem of the Agents, must be entirely ineffectual, where contrary Affections or Passions overballance them; or where some extraordinary present Interest interferes; all the suppos'd Obligation arising from thence must, in such Cases, fail; and consequently, Obligation founded only in that Principle must be defective, as not reaching to all those Cases to which Virtue is suppos'd to extend itself.

3. The Will and Command of God, and what follows upon it, suitable Reward or Punishment, is not only a Superaddition to this natural Motive to Virtue, but likewise must extend to all possible Cases and Circumstances; and consequently is the only thing which can carry with it universal and never-failing Obligation.

I shall leave it therefore to the Judgment of any reasonable Man, whether the present Hypothesis, which derives moral Obligation from the Will of God, be not much more serviceable to the Cause of Virtue, than the Method of building it on the mere Approbation of our Minds, &c. arising from our Perception of the Fitness or Unfitness of

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Actions. If these Reflections are allowed, I hope I may be excus'd in the present Attempt, by those worthy Gentlemen at least, from whom perhaps I differ only in Expression; and especially since both Sides have the same End in View.

Affection or Passion overbalance Reason; or where some extraordinary present Interest intervenes, I all the imposed Obligation arising from thence must, in such Cases, fail; and consequently, Obligation founded only in that Principle must be defective, as not reaching to all those Cases to which Virtue is supposed to extend itself.

The Will of God, and what follows from it, is the only thing which can carry with it universal and never-failing Obligation.

I shall leave it therefore to the Judgment of any reasonable Man, whether the present Hypothesis, which derives moral Obligation from the Will of God, be not much more applicable to the Case of Liberty than the Method of building it on the notion of Reason, which is the subject of the following Chapter.

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## CHAP. II.

*Whether The Law or Religion of Nature  
be absolutely perfect.*



**I**N the former Chapter I have endeavour'd to settle the Meaning of These Terms, *Law or Religion of Nature*; and have shewn that nothing more can properly be understood by them, than such a Collection of moral Principles and Precepts as Men are capable of drawing out for themselves in the Use of that Reason, and those several Opportunities they enjoy. If this be true, it will follow beyond Contradiction, that such a Religion cannot be absolutely perfect. It cannot be more perfect than human Reason itself is: And therefore, if human Reason is not absolutely perfect, neither can that Religion be so, which reaches no farther than human Reason can carry us.

However,



However, tho' I conceive this general Argument is sufficient to overthrow our Author's bold Assertions on this Point; yet, forasmuch as he builds much upon it, and would infer from hence that any Revelation of a new Law is useless and impossible, it may not be improper to consider him more distinctly.

Much were it to be wish'd, that before he had adventur'd to maintain with so much Assurance a Point, in which the soberer Part of the World would be apt to differ from him, he had endeavour'd to make his Meaning clear, by explaining the several Terms he uses; That he had told us What he intends by *Perfection*, as apply'd to Law; What by *absolute Perfection*; and had then produc'd such Arguments as appear'd to prove the Proposition laid down, according to the Sense in which he had before explain'd it.

But it is remarkable throughout this Author's whole Performance, that he affects Obscurity beyond measure. He seldom defines his Terms at all: And if, upon certain Occasions, he appears to be somewhat more explicit, yet in other Parts of his Book he forgets himself, and deserts his own avow'd Interpretations.

Not to go off too far from my Point: Since our Author hath not been so kind as to attempt an Explication of these Terms, I shall introduce what I design to offer, by observing, That

Those

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Those Things are perfect, to which Nothing is wanting.

Those Things are perfect in their Kind, to which nothing is wanting that belongs to Beings of that Rank and Order. And,

Those are absolutely perfect, to which Nothing of any Kind can possibly be added, which would render their State in any Degree better than it is at present.

A Difference therefore we see there is between *Perfection in its Kind*, and *Perfection absolute*. Every Sort of Creatures, as enjoying all the Powers which belong to Beings of that Sort, is perfect in its Kind: And yet, notwithstanding this, there are various Degrees of Perfection in Creatures; nor are there any so entirely excellent, in which Something might not be conceiv'd capable of making their State truly better, and consequently more perfect. But the Supreme Being can receive no Additions of Excellency whatsoever. Nothing can be imagin'd capable of improving or bettering his State. And therefore we affirm of Him, not merely that he is perfect, but that He is absolutely so. This I take to represent the general Notion of Perfection. How it may be apply'd to Law or Religion, and what it imports when thus applied, comes now to be consider'd.

Several Things might here be noted in order to the full Explication of this Article. But not to insist on Matters of lesser Moment,

I shall

I shall observe, that Perfection, as referr'd to Law, must principally be deduc'd from considering the Nature, and the End of it.

The Nature of Law consists in This, that it is the Decree of a Superior, given us for the Direction of our Actions, and to which we are oblig'd to conform ourselves. And the End for which such a Law is, or ought to be given us at all, is, the Attainment of some Good either of ourselves, or others. This End likewise may be consider'd, either, as That ultimate one, to which all Laws whatsoever aim; or else, as That which is the immediate View of each particular Branch of it. For this is remarkable, that over and above a general Tendency to their last End, which all Means, consider'd as such, must unavoidably have, in frequent Instances they have a more immediate Reference to something else; and by producing This, they help forward and promote their last and most general End.

These Things being laid down, it will be proper to observe,

1. That as Laws are given us for the Direction of our Actions, and the very Nature of Law doth partly consist in This, so the Perfection of it must require, that it be perfectly directive; *i. e.* That the Authority on which it rests be certain; and the Meaning of it clear and easy. For where either the Impossi-



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is unknown; or his Authority questionable; or Doubts may arise What his real Meaning is, there the Decree wants something, of which it was capable, in order to direct those Persons for whom it was made.

2. We may observe, That Law is the Decree of a Superior to which we are obliged to conform our Actions; and since we are bound to Obedience by those Sanctions which enforce the Law, its Perfection must require, that it be perfectly enforc'd; i. e. its Sanctions must be entirely sufficient to influence the Subject; so clearly denounc'd, that no Doubts can arise about Them; and so weighty, as reasonably to overballance all Temptations to Disobedience. Without this, the best and most wholesome Directions will be consider'd rather as prudent Advices, than as strictly and properly Laws.

3. We may observe, in reference to the End of Law, That as the Acting what is good, fit, proper, in order to promote The Honour of God and the real Happiness of ourselves and our Fellow Creatures, is that which ought to be aim'd at by it, so the Perfection of this Law must require, that it prescribe every Thing which is necessary or serviceable to this purpose; every thing whereby the Honour of God may be suitably express'd, and the Good both of ourselves and our Fellow Creatures effectually promoted; In short,

short, that it be universal as to the Matter of it.

To which may be added, Lastly, That as the Perfection of Law requires, that it prescribe every Thing which is fit, proper, and good, as having a necessary and immediate Reference to the ultimate End of Law; — so likewise the subordinate Parts of it should be such, as are best and fittest to obtain their particular and subordinate Ends: — That as it should prescribe every thing, which being performed is properly virtuous; so should it likewise set forth the best and most suitable Means, whereby the Practice of Virtue may be supported and forwarded.

Agreeably to this, *Absolute Perfection*, as applied to Law, must require,

Such a Clearness as to the Meaning and Authority of the Law, as can admit of Nothing more in any possible Circumstance.

Such a Strength of Enforcement, as cannot be heighten'd in any way whatsoever.

Such an Extent of Matter, as cannot admit the Addition of any possible Article.

Such a Suitableness of Means and Motives, that Nothing can ever be laid before us of more or greater Importance. Let the Law or Religion of Nature be examin'd on this Foot.

1. Then I do affirm that the Law of Nature is not absolutely perfect, because it is deficient in point of Clearness; and capable

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of being made more plain by immediate, or even Traditional Revelation, than it is by the meer Reasoning of our own Minds about it.

And here, how much soever I am obliged to differ from this Author on other Occasions, I am supported by him in the present Conclusion; since he affirms roundly, "As far as you suppose God's Laws are not plain to any Part of Mankind, so far you derogate from the Perfection of those Laws." [p. 107. l. 1.] The Gentleman, you see, is full and explicit. He maintains, that the Perfection of God's Laws requires, not only that they be plain, but likewise that they be plain to all. Should he therefore be able to prove, that every Particular of the Law of Nature is clearly demonstrable by the Philosopher, yet even This would not evince the absolute Perfection of this Law: It still remains, upon his own Foot of Arguing, that these Particulars must be equally demonstrable by every Man; For, "As far as you suppose God's Laws are not plain to any Part of Mankind, so far you derogate from the Perfection of those Laws."

I know this Passage is applied by this Gentleman to a Purpose very different from that, for which it is here produc'd by me. He maintains, (and hath endeavour'd to evince by Arguments which shall be consider'd hereafter) that the Law of Nature is absolutely perfect. If



If so, it must, saith he, be clear and plain to every Man; because it is inconsistent with The Notion of absolute Perfection in this Law, That it should be difficult or obscure to any. We disagree therefore in This; Our Author would infer from the suppos'd absolute Perfection of this Law, that it must be clear and plain to all; I, on the other hand, contend against this absolute Perfection, from its Deficiency in point of Clearness.

Our Author, we have seen, maintains, that The Law or Religion of Nature is plain and clear to all, — to every Part of Mankind. An Assertion this too bold; where it is in the Power of any single Person to contradict him without any Possibility of being refuted. For tho' it should be admitted, (which I am yet very far from granting,) that every Article in the Law of Nature is plain and evident to Some, — to Persons, for instance, of Parts and Learning; yet, How does it follow from hence, that it must be plain and evident to Every one? Surely some Difference will be made between Men; and the Slave will not be put on an equal Foot with the Philosopher.

This Gentleman shall be allow'd to understand his own Abilities perfectly; and to tell us, if he pleases, not only what he actually knows, but likewise what he is capable of knowing, if he will take any Care about it. But then, I hope he will make some Return for this Concession;

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Concession; and acknowledge that he is not quite so well acquainted with the Capacities of other Men. And if he expects to be credited when he assures us, that The Law of Nature, as comprehending under it every Thing fit and proper, is perfectly known to him, and so exceedingly obvious that nothing can make it more evident; he should allow that others are as proper Judges of their own Abilities as he is of his.

Let us go no farther than his own Draught of natural Religion: This, short and imperfect as it is, contains several Things in it, which, tho' they should be in themselves true, and proveable to Men of Parts and Skill, are yet far from being plain and obvious even to Them; much more are they from being so to all Men. Put the Case of a Debate arising about the Meaning or Evidence of some of his Propositions. This surely may be suppos'd at least: How, I pray, would this Gentleman behave on the Occasion? Would he think it sufficient to affirm, that every Thing was too plain to need either Explication or Proof? Might not his Adversary reply, that He was best Judge of his own Understanding; that the Propositions were to him doubtful and obscure, and the Evidence of their Truth, in whatsoever Sense understood, precarious? Surely, as every Man is best acquainted with his own Capacities, so in Cases of this Nature he must be allowed to answer for himself.

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Some Points there are self-evident ; which neither need nor are really capable of Proof. Others are so immediately connected with self-evident Propositions, that as soon as laid before us their Truth appears, and we can entertain no Doubt about them. Thus, "The Whole is greater than a Part"; and consequently "Things may be affirm'd of The Whole, or of all the Parts taken together, which cannot be affirm'd of any single Part separately taken." Matters of this Kind are plain and obvious ; since they must be clear to every one who is capable of thinking at all about them. But the Case is different where Ideas are exceedingly complex, and the Proposition advanc'd must receive Proof from a long Train of Arguing. In such Instances few are capable of entering far into Matters. Truth becomes obscure ; and cannot easily be discover'd by themselves, or made plain by others.

To apply this to the Case in hand : The more general Rules of Morality, such as are these ; "That God is to be honour'd and obey'd ; — That the Rules of Justice and Charity should be observ'd," and the like, are, I conceive, so plain, that no Doubts can arise about them. But then I would beg to know, Whether every thing else be so exceedingly clear to all ? Whether many Questions may not arise, How and in What Manner God should be honour'd ; — In What Particulars

we



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we may best express our Obedience; —  
What are the several Instances of Justice; and  
What the Measures and Extent of Charity?  
These Things are not quite so clear to all,  
merely on the Foot of their natural Reason;  
and concerning which each Man hath a Right  
to answer for himself, how far they are clear  
and plain.

But not to rest in this, I must observe farther,  
That as Religion implies not only the  
several Precepts which immediately direct  
our Actions, but likewise the several Doctrines  
which serve either to prove or enforce  
these Precepts; so the Clearness of a Religion  
must require a like Clearness in these  
Doctrines. And since our Author affirms,  
that the Perfection of the Law or Religion of  
Nature requires it should be plain to all Mankind,  
the Perfection of this Law or Religion  
must require, that every Part of it, as well  
Doctrines as Precepts, should be clear to all:  
To which I may fairly add, that they must  
be not only clear, but absolutely so; evident  
to such a Degree, that nothing can  
possibly make them more so. Yet, is this  
Fact; or, is there the least Shadow of Truth  
in the Assertion?

The Gentleman I am contending with must  
allow, that all those Points are Doctrines of  
Natural Religion, which, having some Reference  
to natural Duty, are either actually  
known, or at least capable of being so. Such

are, "The Existence of a God"; the first Ground and Foundation of all Religion whatsoever; "The Reality of a Providence; "The several Propositions which regard "The Divine Perfections; and Those likewise, which express the Relations in which we stand to God and other Beings." I do not affirm that every thing of this Kind is simply discoverable in the Use of every Man's Reason: Indeed I cannot think it is: Yet, supposing it were so, still many Things may be simply discoverable, which are not plain.

And indeed in Proof that several Matters, with reference to the Divine Perfections, are not quite so clear to all Mankind, we need only observe the frequent, and sometimes general Errors they have run themselves into on these Heads. Truths, plain and evident to all, will be disputed by few; at least in those Instances, in which their Interests and Passions are not immediately concern'd. In Matters Self-evident, it is scarce possible to impose on any one. In Matters immediately connected with things Self-evident, it is difficult to deceive Men. But in things remote from common Apprehensions, and where extraordinary Attention is necessary, Errors are frequent. But then I affirm that Matters of this Nature are not clear and plain to all: If they were so, Men would be no more liable to err in these Points, than any others assignable:

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able: And if absolute Evidence be irresistible, where such Evidence is, Error must be impossible.

From Doctrines let us proceed to Precepts, and see how Matters stand there. What hath been observ'd above will be found proportionably true on this Head likewise; with this Difference however, that Men's Corrupt Passions being more immediately interested in Matters of Practice than Belief, they will from hence be induc'd to consider Things with a greater Mixture of Partiality. This must, I think, be allow'd: Yet, on the other hand, it ought to be consider'd, that as these Rules of Life are oftentimes deducible from Religious Doctrines, they must be still farther remov'd from First and Self-evident Propositions, than these Doctrines themselves are; and consequently, they must in Proportion be less clear and plain.

Our Author asserts, that to deny a Law is plain to all, must derogate from its Perfection. To maintain therefore its absolute Perfection, we must maintain its absolute Clearness. And since The Law or Religion of Nature includes under it not only a few general Rules, but likewise the several particular Precepts relating to what is right and fit; it follows, that these Precepts likewise must be absolutely clear to all; and, of Consequence, they must all of them be equally clear; it being impossible there



should be any Difference of Degrees with regard to absolute Clearness or Perfection. Let us see therefore, whether all the several Precepts of Morality are equally clear and plain.

And here it might be observ'd in general, that as these Precepts are more nearly, or more remotely connected with first Principles, they must of course be proveable with greater or less Dispatch and Ease; and consequently, the Evidence of such Points must admit different Degrees of Clearness.

Or, if this be question'd, the Matter may be put beyond all manner of Doubt by producing Instances. To destroy the Life of another Man without sufficient Cause or Provocation, is so clearly wrong, that no Person, who thinks at all, can misjudge about it; and so the Precept against Murther may be thought abundantly plain and evident. But can the same be affirm'd of *Suicide*? May it not seem at first Sight, and to a Person untis'd to think deeply, that Men have somewhat greater Power over themselves, than they have over other Men? and that as Life is valuable, only consider'd as the Foundation of Happiness, so when it becomes the Ground of Misery, Men have the same Liberty to quit Life, as they have to decline Misery? I am not now pleading for Self-Murther; nor do I do think in the least that Arguments of this Kind are strictly con-

clusive.

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clusive. All I contend for, is, that the Unlawfulness of Suicide, (how unfit soever the thing may be in itself,) is not quite so clear, as the Unlawfulness of Murther; That some Points therefore in Morality are less clear than others; and consequently, that all are not absolutely clear and plain.

Thus again; The common Offices of Humanity are so exceedingly suited to our natural Inclinations, and the plain Reason of the Thing, that no Questions can arise, Whether we are not concern'd to embrace every Opportunity of discharging them. This Point therefore is plain and clear to all. However, it may be justly thought, that as we are concern'd to shew a proper Regard for others, so we have still a Right to have some Respect to ourselves: And it is not quite so clear, How far we ought to sacrifice our own Interests to those of other Men. At least every one will not be able to see immediately, that he is oblig'd to lay down his Life for others; not only to throw up all Advantages he enjoys, but the very Foundation of them likewise. This is indeed proper to be done on certain Occasions; But we are not now discoursing about the real Fitness of the Thing, but the Evidence of the Precept.

Once more; There is hardly any one Point in Morality, which doth not admit of various Degrees of Clearness in different Pe-

riods of Life. The very same Man must perceive things in different Lights, as Experience and Study shall open his Mind, and gradually improve his Reason. Can any one affirm, that he had the same View of every Point of Morality when he first employ'd his Thoughts about it, which he afterwards had upon Increase of Years, and a Maturity of Consideration? But if some Things are capable of becoming more clear by an advantageous Change of Circumstances, then 'tis certain they are not absolutely clear to all: and every Man who doth but reflect a little on his own gradual Progress in moral Wisdom and Knowledge, must be conscious of this Truth.

If it should be reply'd to this, that the Question before us relating to the Law or Religion of Nature, must concern those only who are arriv'd at a Maturity of Judgment; and consequently, no Room can be allow'd for putting Cases of unripe or uncultivated Reason; If This, I say, should be alledged, I must beg to know, Whether Men are not to be accounted Moral Agents till they come to the full Use and Exercise of their Judgment: If they are, then the Religion of Nature must concern Them as well as other Men: For, Those only are free from Law, who are absolutely incapable of knowing it. Obscurity may detract from its absolute Perfection, but doth not destroy its Nature.

After



After all, tho' we should give up this Argument, and confine our Debate to those Persons only, who are arriv'd at a Maturity of Years; yet still, Can it be affirm'd, that every Point of moral Import is plain and clear to all? Hath it ever prov'd so to the best and wisest Philosophers? Whence then hath arisen their great Uncertainty in some Points, and their Error in others? Whence such Contradictions in their several Systems, — some teaching as Matters of Duty what others condemn'd as impious? It would be sufficient for my purpose if I produc'd any one single Instance, either of Doubt, or of Mistake in any One Philosopher, who appear'd to have consider'd Matters with tolerable Care; because our Author allows, that the absolute Perfection of the Law of Nature requires it should be plain to *all*. But when we find that all of them have err'd in many Points, What other Conclusion can we draw than This, That however attainable a full and distinct Knowledge in these Matters may be thought, yet there is great Difficulty in making such Attainments; and consequently, that The Law of Nature is not, even with respect to the Wisest Men, absolutely clear and plain.

But, if this shall be found true even with respect to Wise and Great Men, and those who have devoted themselves to the Study of moral Truth, What greater Clearness can

we expect to find with regard to the Vulgar and Illiterate? Things are clear and plain in reference to the Apprehensions of those Persons to whom they are propos'd. To Men of less Capacities, they must consequently be less plain: and therefore, we may argue *fortiori*, that all Things of a moral Nature neither are, nor can be absolutely plain to all.

This, which may appear by reasoning from the Nature of Things, will be farther confirm'd if we consider Fact, and what are the real Sentiments of Mankind concerning moral Matters. Upon Examination we may find, that the Generality have clear and full Conceptions of very few Things: Their Ideas, in most Cases, are obscure and perplex'd: and those they have, will be found to be rather borrow'd, in their last Result, from some Divine Instruction, than produc'd by their own Reasonings about them. So far is human Understanding, as it subsists in Fact, from being capable of those Great Matters which are sometimes ascrib'd to it!

2. The next Point to be consider'd is This; Whether The Law or Religion of Nature be enforc'd in a manner absolutely perfect, *i. e.* by Sanctions not only clear and certain, but such likewise, that nothing greater or more forceable can possibly be conceiv'd by us.

Yet,

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Yet, before I enter on this Point, it will be proper to guard against Misapprehension, and to shew in what Sense I desire to be understood here. I do suppose therefore that, there is a Liberty subsisting in human Nature, *i. e.* a Power of acting or not acting as we please. Without this there could be no such Thing as moral Agency in Man at all: All Laws would be vain; and their Sanctions of course fruitless. Of this Liberty every Man is conscious. And tho' Difficulties may be started as well on this, as several other Points, to which we may not be able to give distinct Solutions, yet we are certain of the Thing itself; and as intimately conscious of it, as we are of our very Being.

This Liberty being suppos'd, I do affirm, that the most absolute Enforcement of Law must consist with this Liberty; and consequently, must be such, as may be either neglected, or withstood. I do therefore by no means argue against the absolute Perfection of the Law of Nature from hence merely, that the Sanctions of it do often miss their Effect. This might happen, however perfect we should suppose these Sanctions in their own Nature. For, whilst Liberty subsists, a Power must remain of neglecting these Sanctions; and what Law itself essentially supposes, the Sanctions of Law cannot possibly destroy.

This,

Yet,



This, I say, being suppos'd, *viz.* That there is a Liberty essential to Human Nature, which no Enforcements of Law whatsoever can destroy; and consequently, that as Law itself is a moral Rule, so the Enforcements of Law must be moral Enforcements; which not being absolutely irresistible, may miss their Effect, either thro' Inattention or Obstinacy; I proceed to shew, on What Foot I maintain, that the Sanctions of the Law of Nature are not absolutely perfect.

Now the first and most obvious Sanctions are those which arise from the natural Tendencies and Consequences of Men's Actions. Thus, Temperance, Contentment, Patience, Meekness, and the like, are really conducive to our natural Good; and the contrary Vices carry with them certain Degrees of natural Evil. This holds true in all those Duties which properly respect ourselves. But then it should be observ'd, that the Connection between Duty and Happiness is not equally apparent in all Cases. In some the Effects, however real, are yet so remotely join'd to their Causes, that every Man is not apt to discover them: And so far forth as Sanctions of this Kind escape Observation, they must lose their proper Use, *viz.* the Enforcement of the Law.

But the greatest Difficulties will arise with regard to the Offices between Man and Man; in which, tho' there be some natural Ad-

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vantages which frequently attend the Dis-  
 charge of Duty, yet, on many Occasions, In-  
 terest may draw the other Way. Men may  
 find a present Account much better by In-  
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 rightness: And it may happen, by a Concur-  
 rence of untoward Circumstances, that an Ad-  
 hering to the strict Rules of Virtue shall ruin  
 those very Interests, which ought to be sup-  
 ported by it.

If, in aid of these natural Sanctions, (which  
 cannot but appear insufficient to support the  
 universal Practice of Virtue;) If, I say, in  
 aid of these, The Civil Power be called in,  
 yet still This Expedient will fail us: — Not  
 only, because Sanctions of this Kind not be-  
 longing to The Law of Nature, purely as  
 such, concern it only as that Law is confirm'd  
 by The Civil Power; but likewise, because  
 on this Foot Virtue will be enforced no far-  
 ther than perhaps weak or corrupt Men are  
 pleas'd to support it: And if Civil Authority  
 should come into bad Hands, Virtue may  
 find Discouragement; and the Interests of  
 Vice be supported by those Powers, which  
 ought to suppress it. To which may be added,  
 that however just, wise, and good the Admi-  
 nistration of Things may be, yet still as Abun-  
 dance of Evil may be committed, which  
 must escape the Observation of Men, so the  
 universal Practice of Virtue can find no Sup-  
 port this way. Men have neither Power  
 enough

enough to reward every Thing which is right, nor to punish every Thing which is wrong; nor have they Knowledge sufficient to direct the Exercise of that power they enjoy.

After all, it may perhaps be thought, that what-ever is wanting either in the Natural or Civil Sanctions of Virtue, will be made up by the ordinary Dispensations of Providence; and consequently, that Men may expect from The Divine Administration the Support of those Laws, which cannot, on any other Foot, be maintain'd. But then, will Fact and Experience justify these Presumptions? Is it found, that every good Man prospers in Proportion to his steady Love of Virtue, and that every bad Man suffers as he turns aside from the Paths of Righteousness? Hath not the Question concerning The unequal Distribution of Good and Evil in the present Life, exercised Mens Minds in all Ages; and put them upon several Expedients, either to solve or to break thro' the Difficulty?

The wiser and better Sort indeed have reason'd well; and argu'd, that as God must have an unalterable Love of Righteousness, so He cannot be suppos'd to leave its Interests entirely unsupported. If therefore the present Management of Things will not admit a perfect Adjustment, yet Amends may be made hereafter; and this hath led them to the Persuasion of a future State.

And



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And yet it appears by the Remains of the best Writers of Antiquity, that they rather wish'd and hop'd for something of this Kind, than firmly and steadily believed it. Not a few expressly rejected this Doctrine: And those others, who upon some Occasions discover'd a great Forwardness to entertain it, or had advanc'd exceeding probable Auguments for the Support of it, yet could not forbear intimating their Distrust, and a Suspicion at least that Matters might possibly prove otherwise.

However, let us make the most of this; and suppose that These Great and Good Men had not only satisfy'd their own Minds in so concerning a Point, but (which is more,) had happily gain'd a strict Demonstration on this Head: Yet still, before this Doctrine of future Rewards and Punishments can have its full Force on the World, the rest of Mankind must be equally satisfied likewise. They must either discover the Proof themselves, or apprehend it clearly when discover'd by others. Any thing short of this must fail them. For the Force of Temptations will not be born down by slight Presumptions of what (for any thing They can prove) may never be.

Now to this Purpose it is necessary, that the following Points be clear'd;

1. That the Mind or Soul is really distinct from the Body; and that it may, and necessarily

family must survive the Destruction of it. For, without this, there is no sufficient Foundation left for a future State, nor consequently for future Rewards or Punishments.

2. It must be prov'd, That as The Soul survives the Body, so it must likewise exist in a conscious State; For, to exist without a Consciousness of what happens, is to all Intents and Purposes the same as not to exist at all. And,

Lastly, That in this future State The Soul shall be conscious either of Happiness or Misery in Proportion to its good or evil Conduct in the present Life. For otherwise, what-ever Good or Evil shall happen, it cannot be consider'd under the Notion of Reward or Punishment; nor consequently, as the Sanction of Divine Laws at all.

These Points, I say, are necessary to be clear'd, in order to prove a future State, on the Foot of natural Reason. And tho' I am fully perswaded they are all of them capable of Proof; and perhaps have, many Ages since, been made good by some Wise and Good Men; yet, they are Matters too much involv'd to be made apparent to the Bulk and Generality of Mankind. How few are there capable of entering so far into abstract and metaphysical Reasoning, as to discern clearly all the several Steps necessary in this Argument? And if these cannot be perceiv'd distinctly, as the whole Evidence

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Evidence will be obscure, so the Effects of this Doctrine on the Lives of Men will be proportionably small.

I do by no means deny but a certain Persuasion there hath generally been amongst Mankind, that they shall, some time or other, enjoy or suffer in Proportion as they have behaved well or ill. And That little Virtue, which hath been practis'd in the World, hath received its chief Support from this Principle. But then it deserves to be consider'd, that a Difference ought to be made between common and extraordinary Occasions. Where Temptations are slight, and the Prospect even of temporal Convenience shall help to ballance them, Men may easily be induc'd by the Hopes, and even Suspicions of a future State. But let us see how Matters are like to stand, when Passions or Appetites urge strongly; when Opportunities of doing ill present themselves, without the Hazard of present Discovery or Punishment; when the sticking firm to Virtue shall not only hinder present Advancement, but perhaps draw after it a long Train of Inconvenience: Let us only suppose, that by turning aside from the Rules of Righteousness, Men may secure to themselves all the Advantages This Life can give them; and by an obstinate Adherence to its Interests, must forfeit even Life itself. What shall, in such a Case be sufficient to fix their Choice?

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If



If indeed they are as certain of the future as they are of the present, then a wise Man will have no Room to deliberate. But if these Prospects are doubtful and insecure; and supported only by a Persuasion, of which they know not how to give a rational Account, the Effect of it must be as slight as the Persuasion itself is. For we may easily assure ourselves, Men will not, in any very concerning Points, throw up present Certainities for the Sake of future Possibilities.

After all, Let us suppose that the Evidence of a future State were equally clear to all Men. On this Foot the Laws of Nature would be attended with Sanctions truly excellent; and such as could not but have a considerable Weight with all those who should seriously attend to them. Yet still I can by no means agree with this Gentleman, That even These Enforcements would be absolutely perfect. My Reason, in short, is This: No Enforcements can be absolutely perfect, where any thing more perfect in That Kind can be conceiv'd: And whether a future State of Rewards and Punishments in the general, (which is all that can be concluded from natural Reason,) can come up to this, deserves our Consideration.

All that Human Reason, how much soever improv'd, can suggest on this Head, is, That the Advantages of Obedience shall, upon the whole,

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whole, over-balance the Disadvantages; and that a Man shall gain more by sticking firm to the Cause of Virtue, than can possibly be had in a contrary Course. What therefore these Rewards or Punishments shall be; — How great; — How lasting, doth by no means appear. But will any one affirm, that such general Sanctions are quite so perfect as those which are more distinct, more full, more explicit? Are Temporary Enforcements to be compar'd with Eternal; or, are Men full as likely to be influenc'd by the View of some indeterminate Good or Ill, (how great, how lasting they know not,) as they are by the certain Expectations of exceeding Happiness or Misery, to which nothing can ever put an End?

The Sanctions of Law are to be consider'd under the Notion of Means; the End of which must be Obedience to the Law. Those therefore which are most apt to produce this End, are in their Nature most perfect. And if the Prospect of Eternal Happiness or Misery be more likely to attain this End, than the Prospect of such only as is temporary or short; then it follows, that the former Sanctions must be more perfect than the latter. The Consequence from hence is certain; That forasmuch as mere Natural Reason cannot prove the Eternity of future Rewards or Punishments, it cannot suggest to us such

Sanctions of The Law of Nature, as are absolutely perfect.

3. A Third Article on which I would examine the Perfection of this Law, is, Whether it be universal as to its Extent; I mean, Whether it comprehends under it every Thing which is, or may be fit and proper Matter of that Law.

To this Purpose a good deal hath been already offered in the former Chapter. I have there endeavour'd to evince, that Nothing can be to us a Law which is not by us discoverable; from which it follows, that Nothing is to us a Law, or Part of The Law of Nature, which is not by us discoverable in the Use of Reason. If therefore the Law of Nature be universal as to its Extent, it follows, that every Man is capable of discovering all Things which are in their Nature fit, and therefore proper Matter of Law. But is this really Fact? Is there exactly the same Capacity in all? and do not the very same Persons vary from themselves in this Respect, as they grow more in Years, and greater Opportunities of Learning and Improvement are put into their Hands?

It will be in vain to reply here, that "All Men have Means of Knowledge sufficient for the Circumstances They are in." If the Gentleman intends, that a Just and Merciful God will treat Men in Proportion to the

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Means and Opportunities they enjoy, and the Use they are found to make of them, what he asserts is true. In this Sense every Man hath sufficient Means of Knowledge: And it is on this Foot I maintain, that no Man is, or can be oblig'd to Rules he is absolutely incapable of knowing. But then the Question is, Whether every Man is capable of knowing all Things, which are of real Moment to him; all those Fitnesses, which if discover'd would point out to him the Will of God, and carry with them moral Obligation? If not, then however his own Law of Nature may be to him sufficient, and in that Sense perfect, yet it cannot be justly thought all-sufficient, or all-perfect; it cannot be reasonably esteem'd absolutely perfect.

In Proof of the Point, I am here concern'd to make good, several Things have indeed been suggested in the former Chapter; from which I would not willingly borrow, nor trouble the Reader with needless Repetitions. Yet 'tis a difficult Matter to avoid every Thing of that Kind: And since these Arguments are now produc'd for a Purpose different from what they serv'd before, I shall be excus'd if I resume them here, whilst I endeavour to give them a new Turn, and place them in a different Order.

It hath been observ'd, That Nothing can be to us a Law, which we are incapable of knowing; and therefore, Nothing can be to

us any Part of The Law of Nature, which we are incapable of discovering by our natural Reason.

These Things being laid down, we may argue,

i. That as soon as Men come to such a Degree of Reason as to discover the Being of a God, and to be satisfied of his Providence over us, They must be sensible of their Obligations to obey his Will; But, Wherein his Will consists, or, What are the Particulars in which they may testify their Obedience, is the great Point in Question.

Thus much in general may appear obvious enough: That as God is The Author of Nature, He must be presum'd to will whatsoever shall be found suitable to the Condition and Relations in which Men stand; But then, What Particulars are really proper in these Respects, is another Question, and not so easily to be decided.

Some Instances may be clear enough, and offer themselves to the Mind upon the very first Reflection. Yet others are more remote: Time, and Observation, and Study may be necessary as well in Moral as Natural Science; and it is seen in Fact, that Men gradually improve as well in the one as the other.

Now, if this be the Case; and if Nothing can be properly a Law to any Man, whilst

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he is incapable of knowing it ; it will follow, that our Law of Nature, in our more early Years at least, is defective in Extent ; For, it Then comes short of those things which are afterwards knowable ; and which, as soon as they are so, carry with them moral Obligation. To say, that such a Law as This, is absolutely perfect, is to affirm, that a Part is equal to the Whole.

It may be observ'd, 2dly, That as Men differ very much from each other in Degrees of natural Capacity, and the Opportunities, whether of improving their rational Powers, or of applying them to the Discovery of those Truths to which they are perhaps equal ; so it is evident, their several Systems of moral Precepts must be more or less compleat. I have noted heretofore, how much the Philosophers had, in this Respect, an Advantage over the Bulk of Mankind. But, if Nothing is to any Man a Law which he is incapable of knowing, whether thro' Want of Capacity or Opportunity ; it follows, that The Law of Nature, as it regards The Bulk of Mankind, must be defective in Extent ; because, with regard to them, it must be less extensive than with regard to The Philosopher.

It will be to no Purpose to reply, That as no one can be bound to those Things he is incapable of knowing, so every Man's Law reaching to all Things which are to him Matters of Duty, it must therefore, with  
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regard to him be perfectly extensive: This Answer, I say, is vain: For, the present Question, is, Not Whether every Man's Law be to him a perfect, *i. e.* a sufficient Rule of Duty; — but, Whether it be so perfect, as to take in every thing which is proper Matter of Law: Not, Whether his Law be relatively perfect; but, Whether it be absolutely so.

To go on; 3dly, We may observe, that the several Schemes of Morality advanc'd by the Philosophers were in many respects different from each other; some of them inculcating what others either neglected or oppos'd. The main Points were indeed admitted and contended for by the several Sects; But whilst they differ'd in others, the Laws which the Reason of each severally taught them, could with no Propriety be term'd the same. Now, as far forth as any of these Schemes fell short, in any Point of moral Concern; I say, as far as they fell short of what was well advanc'd by any other Sect, so far, at least, it fail'd in point of Extent. And, Whether This hath not prov'd the Case, must be submitted to every one who will give himself the Pains to search.

To this shall be added, Lastly, That as Human Reason, whether we consider it as subsisting in single Persons, or as dispers'd thro' our whole Kind, is imperfect, so it cannot take in all the Relations subsist-  
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ing in Nature; nor consequently, all the Fitnesses resulting from these Relations. Now, if all these Relations, and all these Fitnesses are not discoverable by us in the Use of our Reason; and if nothing is to us a Law, which is by us undiscoverable; it must follow, that our Law of Nature cannot possibly reach to every thing which is fit and proper Matter of that Law; and consequently, as it is not absolutely extensive, it cannot be absolutely perfect.

On the other side of this Question our Author hath alledg'd Two Arguments. The First is presumptive, and design'd to prove, that our Law of Nature must take in every Thing which makes for the Good of our Souls, *i. e.* must be perfectly extensive; because he apprehends it is inconsistent with the Goodness of God to order Matters otherwise. The Second maintains, that all the particular Rules of Morality are reducible to One or Two Principles, which are allow'd on all Hands to be knowable by every Man concern'd in the present Question.

The former we meet with *p. 11.* where this Gentleman expresses himself in the following manner; "Can it be suppos'd, that  
" an infinitely Good and Gracious Being,  
" which gives Men Notice by their Senses  
" what does Good or Hurt to their Bodies,  
" has had less Regard for the immortal Part,  
" and has not given them at all Times, by  
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“ the Light of their Understanding, sufficient Means to discover what makes for the  
 “ Good of their Souls; but has necessitated  
 “ them, or any of them, to continue from  
 “ Age to Age in destructive Ignorance or  
 “ Error? ”

There are Two Things contain'd in this Argument; *First*, that the Goodness of God requires he should give Men by the Light of their Understanding sufficient Means to discover What [*i. e.* whatsoever] makes for the Good of their Souls. And *2dly*, That this is suitable to his Conduct towards the animal Part of us; For, He gives Men Notice, by their Senses, what does Good or Hurt to their Bodies.

I shall chuse to begin my Remarks on this latter Position; because, by overthrowing this, I shall weaken the former, which derives a great Part of its Strength from it. Now, is This Fact, That God gives Men Notice by their Senses what does Good or Hurt to their Bodies? Is it true, that Men perceive before-hand whatsoever is likely to be serviceable or prejudicial to them? I say, before-hand, because the Notices, which come afterwards, come too late to direct them what they should either chuse or avoid. So far is this from being the real State of Things, that in most Cases Men learn what is Good or Bad rather from Experience of their several Effects, than from any forego-

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ing Notices which their Senses give them; And this is the true Reason why Persons, in their earlier Years, are apt so frequently to err this way. Now, if our Author's Assertion here be groundless and wrong, then his Argument for a like extensive Knowledge of what relates to the Mind, must be defective likewise.

But, the Gentleman carries the Matter still farther; and endeavours to infer his Point from the infinite Goodness of the Divine Being. "This, he says, requires, He should give them, by the Light of their Understanding, sufficient Means to discover What [*i. e.* whatsoever] makes for the Good of their Souls": These Means therefore He hath in Fact given them.

Now, I conceive, it is much safer and more reasonable to argue from known Fact to What is really fit and right for God to do, than to endeavour the Overthrow of What is certain Fact, by uncertain Presumptions what the Divine Attributes require. We are sure, since our Knowledge is imperfect, *i. e.* since our Nature is so, we neither do, nor possibly can know all the Reasons and Fittests of Things; We cannot possibly discover every thing, which might conduce to our moral Perfection; nor consequently, every thing, which might make for our Good. From hence we may justly infer, that such a Constitution is really consistent with  
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The Divine Goodness: And, if this Gentleman still thinks otherwise, I would desire him to consider the Principle into which the Argument he alledges must unavoidably resolve itself, *viz.* Absolute Goodness requires the Production of all that Good, which is capable of being produc'd. If this be admitted, then it must require likewise, that every Man should be capable of all possible Good; and consequently, that he should be possess'd of all possible Perfection; and That, as there ought to be no Difference between particular Men in this respect, so neither should there be so between any Creatures whatsoever. — I forbear pursuing this Matter farther: It will end, we see, not barely in *Deism*, but *Atheism*.

n. B.

To return; Thus much may indeed be concluded from the Divine Goodness, that no Man is plac'd in such Circumstances, as shall make him miserable [finally and irrecoverably so] without his own Fault; and consequently, that every Man enjoys the Means of Knowledge, so far as may be sufficient to prevent the Anger of God, and the Miseries of another Life. But how far God is concern'd to bestow Favours, *i. e.* in what Measure and Proportion, is a Matter of which we are entirely incapable of judging. And, if we cannot affirm that Goodness requires Men should enjoy the highest Degrees of Happiness, neither doth it require they should en-

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joy equally the Means and Opportunities of attaining it. The Consequence from hence is clear; That notwithstanding God is infinitely, *i. e.* absolutely Good and Gracious, yet He may not give Men, by the Light of their Understanding, sufficient Means to discover what [*i. e.* whatsoever] makes for the Good of their Souls.

The next Argument by which our Author would prove The Law of Nature to be absolutely extensive, is This; All the particular Rules of Morality whatsoever are reducible to One or Two Principles, which are allow'd on all Hands to be knowable by every Man concern'd in the present Question.

It is variously stated in the Beginning of his Seventh Chapter; and that I may not be thought to injure him, I shall chuse to represent it in his own Words. "If, says he, "our natural Notions of the Divine Per-  
"fections demonstrate that God will require  
"Nothing of his Creatures but what tends to  
"their Good; Whatsoever is of this Kind,  
"is a Superstructure which belongs to the  
"Law of Nature." Again; "It is evi-  
"dent by the Light of Nature what are  
"those Relations we stand in to God and  
"our Fellow Creatures; and neither God,  
"nor Man, without acting tyrannically, can  
"require more than these require." Again;  
"Original Revelation contains every thing  
"obligatory upon account of its Excellency;  
*i. e.*



## 110 A DEFENCE of

"i.e. every thing which tends to the Honour of God, or the Good of Man." Once more; "By The Law of Nature, as well as the Gospel, The Honour of God and the Good of Man being the two Grand or General Commandments, all particular Precepts must be comprehended under These Two."

In the last way of Stating this Matter it is asserted, that all particular Precepts must be comprehended under these Two General ones, viz. To honour God, and to do Good to Man; and these, it is said, reach to every Thing obligatory upon account of its Excellency. It had been asserted just before, that neither God nor Man can require any Thing more than the Relations we stand in to God and our Fellow Creatures require; and all this is still farther resolv'd into One single Principle, viz. that of Self-good; more than this God will not require of any one.

We shall allow readily, that every Man is concern'd to act for the Honour of God, and the Good of Men; and that, in the last Result, these Rules will be found to coincide: so that the Most general Principle is This, All men should act what tends some way or other to promote their own real Good. Let us see whether this general Principle will comprehend under it every thing of moral Import, so as to fix every such Particular as a Branch of the Law of Nature.

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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. III

Here then I must recollect what hath been mention'd so often before, That nothing can be to us a Law, or a Branch of the Law of Nature, any farther than it is by us discoverable. However certain therefore Men may possibly be of some One general Point, and consequently lie under a general Obligation arising from thence, yet still, unless all the particular Conclusions, from thence deducible, are apparent, as well as the general Principle itself, these Conclusions will not be to them Parts or Branches of their Law. The general Principle may be known or knowable; and consequently, may carry with it moral Obligation: But then, the Particulars, however really contain'd under it, or deducible from it, may to some Persons not be knowable; and so far as this carry with them no moral Obligation. Be it, that Men are perfectly satisfied, they ought to pursue their own real Happiness, The Good of their Fellow Creatures, and the Honour of God; or, (to alter the Expression a little,) Be it, that they should act suitably to their several Relations; — do what is fit and proper; and pursue what is truly excellent: Yet notwithstanding, unless we may know distinctly every thing which conduces to our own Happiness, the Good of our Fellow Creatures, and the Honour of God; unless we can point out exactly all the several Relations in which we stand, and discern perfectly

fectly what is in Truth suitable to these Relations; Unless every Thing which is fit, proper, excellent, lies open to us; These general Rules, however extensive they may be in their own Nature, will not be perfectly extensive to us; and consequently, cannot prove, that The Law or Religion of Nature, (in the strict Sense of the Expression,) takes in every Thing which is fit and proper Matter of that Law. — As I shall have Occasion to resume this Point hereafter, in another Part of my Work, I shall dismiss it for the present, and hasten to the 4th Article, on which the Perfection of The Law of Nature should be examin'd, viz. Whether This Law proposes the best and most suitable Means for the Support and Improvement of Virtue; and such, that nothing of greater or higher Moment can possibly be propos'd to us.

The Means, I have now in View, are not necessary in every State and Condition of Man, but founded on the present Circumstances of our Nature; in which it is observable, and acknowledg'd by the best and wisest Men we know of, that there is a strong Tendency and Propension to things in themselves wrong.

Those who have consider'd Matters with no better Light than Human Reason could give them, have been apt to conclude, that our Nature was not always in the same State



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State in which we find it now; — that as it came pure out of the Hands of our Maker, our Understanding must have been clearer and more extensive, and our Affections or Passions more governable. Of this, which could only be conjectur'd by natural Light, the sacred Writings have given us a distinct Account; informing us, that our Nature, originally upright, hath been deprav'd and corrupted by the Transgression of our first Parents.

On this we build a Distinction concerning the Twofold State of Man: The one, in which his Understanding serv'd him for every purpose to which Human Understanding can serve; The other, in which it is defective as to those Points which are of the highest Importance to him: The One, in which Men's Passions were entirely regular or governable; The other, in which they are heighten'd beyond due Bounds, leading Men either to bad Ends, or to good ones in a bad and irregular way.

In consequence of this Evil State we find, that every Man hath in Fact sinned; — violated, in some respect or other, the Rules which his own Reason taught him; and consequently, hath expos'd himself to the Displeasure of that Being, who prescrib'd these Rules. The present State of Man is, I say, This; He is a Sinner, as having broken that Law which he knew or might have known;

*"The Doctrine of Original Sin has it self no foundation: so far is from being a proper foundation to build upon"*



known; on which account He is liable to Punishments he knows not how to avoid; And, as being corrupt likewise, he hath not an Heart to combat the Difficulties of a future Obedience. He needs therefore Assurance of Pardon in the one case, and some extraordinary Aids and Assurances in the other. On any other Foot, the Cause of Virtue cannot be sufficiently maintain'd; Consequently, That Law or Religion, which cannot account for these Particulars, must fail us in a very important Concern; and therefore, cannot be esteem'd absolutely perfect.

*\* This is, I think, a mistake; & reason can account for these particulars, in the same manner the scripture really does: This author, I think, if he don't take care, will spoil his book.*

I begin with observing, that mere Human Reason cannot give us full Assurance of Pardon for past Offences.

Thus much will be allow'd on all Hands, That Offences, merely as such, cannot claim a Pardon. If they could, then farewell to the Sanctions of God's Laws; — to the Doctrine of a Providence; and to the Justice and Wisdom of God. On this Foot, the Cause of Virtue must lose its main Support; and it would be indifferent in a manner, whether Men acted right or wrong. Now, if Offences, as such, cannot claim a Pardon, the Offender must hope to escape Punishment on account of something or other done in order to atone for them; and what may be done this way, deserves Consideration.

The

REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 115

The wiser and better Part of Mankind have fix'd on these Two ways, *viz.* Sacrifice and Repentance. Now, if Human Reason cannot necessarily infer a Pardon on the Performance of Either, or Both of these; it follows, that it cannot give us any absolute Assurance of Pardon at all; and consequently, without some farther Light, must leave us in sad Doubts and Perplexities.

As to Sacrifices, if they are consider'd merely as prescrib'd by Human Reason, and without Regard to any Divine Institution, they seem to carry with them Nothing more than an Acknowledgement of our own Demerits. They represent to us indeed the Death, which we ourselves deserve; But, What Connexion is there between the meriting Punishment, and the escaping it?

It must be confess'd, that in another way they may serve Purposes truly excellent. By keeping up a quick Sense of the Demerit of Sin, they serve to prevent it for the future; and consequently, lay the Foundation of Obedience for the Time to come. But then, What Relation hath This to Pardon for Sins already committed? If it hath any, we must resolve it into This Principle; That Repentance being a sufficient Atonement, Sacrifices must conduce to the same End, as being conducive to Repentance. And this leads me to enquire, Whether Repentance can in this

this Case effect, what Sacrifice of itself cannot.

In Repentance these Two Things are especially implied; *viz.* A Sorrow for what is past, with firm Resolutions of Amendment for the future; which, if they end in actual Amendment, the Repentance is complete, and our Resolutions entirely justified.

It will be allow'd by every one, that mere Sorrow must be entirely fruitless. Whatever Effects therefore it hath, must arise from That Amendment which accompanies it; and whether This can give sufficient Assurance of Pardon, deserves to be consider'd.

I know, in all Ages of the World Men have been willing to hope thus much, That a Good and Merciful Being will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss, but rather accept those who have offended in the past, upon their Return to him for the future. But Hope is One Thing, and Certainty is another. Hope they must in This, if in any Thing at all: This is the utmost, and indeed the only Thing they can do in such Circumstances: And therefore, if they have no Encouragement from hence, their Case must be entirely desperate; and no sufficient Inducements remain for attempting their Recovery from a vicious State. Hope therefore they did, and might: But the Question at present, is, Whether we can conclude  
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with Certainty from the mere Principles of Human Reason, that absolute Pardon must necessarily follow Repentance.

The Negative seems to be pretty evident from hence, that the Relation between The Creator and the Creature as such, continuing thro' all Parts of the Creature's Existence the same, it is clear, that an absolute Obedience in every Particular must be always due: Obedience therefore for the future must as really be due, as Obedience was in the past; and Repentance itself (complete Repentance I mean) is nothing else but a future Obedience succeeding a past Transgression. This Obedience which would have been his Duty, on Supposition of past Innocence, can make no Amends for past Transgression: The mere View of this cannot be a Reason why such Transgression should be pardon'd: It may recommend the present, but cannot excuse the past.

Let us consider That Obedience which is owing to God thro' every Moment of our Being as a Debt charg'd upon us, and which we are concern'd to answer as often as call'd upon. Imagine therefore a Person who hath refus'd this Payment on a certain Occasion, and contracted an Arrear of Debt; Will a constant Payment for the future be sufficient to discharge this Arrear? If this cannot be, then neither can a future Obedience, (which is none other than the answering those De-



mands which are made on us for the future,) give full Assurance of Pardon for the past Violation of God's Laws.

And as it may appear from considering the Nature and Extent of our Obligations to God, that mere Obedience for the future, or, if you please, Repentance, cannot of itself ensure our Pardon; so are there likewise, Secondly, some Grounds for suspecting, that the Supreme Being will not wholly overlook the Sinner, nor restore him to full Favour merely on Account of such Obedience.

A wise Law-giver is concern'd to guard his Laws by the Execution of proper Sanctions; which to remit entirely, is, in effect, to give up the Law. If God is concern'd to give Men Laws at all, He is equally concern'd to enforce the Observance of them; and consequently, to punish their Violation in some Sort or other. From hence it might seem, that God would not be fully reconcil'd to the Sinner merely in Consequence of his future Obedience; but would take some Method or other to vindicate his Honour, and to impress a Sense of the Obligations Men are under to a constant and never-failing Obedience.

To which may be added, Thirdly, That as Wisdom is a Perfection in The Divine Being as well as Goodness, so Nothing can be properly an Act of Goodness, which is not consistent with Wisdom; and consequently,

And as it may appear from considering the Nature and Extent of our Obligations to God, that mere Obedience for the future, or, if you please, Repentance, cannot of itself ensure our Pardon; so are there likewise, Secondly, some Grounds for suspecting, that the Supreme Being will not wholly overlook the Sinner, nor restore him to full Favour merely on Account of such Obedience.

A wise Law-giver is concern'd to guard his Laws by the Execution of proper Sanctions; which to remit entirely, is, in effect, to give up the Law.

\* This a simple and necessary consequence, which reason suggests as of necessity does effectually do.

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# REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 119

quently, in order to know for certain How far a future Obedience will avail for our Pardon, we must not only consider what might be hop'd from The Divine Goodness; but likewise whether it be consistent with a perfectly wise Administration to accept Repentance for this Purpose. Now, this we cannot, by our natural Reason, be entirely sure of, unless we are able to see through the whole Scheme of Things; unless we are able to determine concerning every particular End which may be answer'd by Punishment; and to prove that Wisdom is concern'd to pardon every Man upon Repentance and Amendment.

If God indeed shall offer Pardon; and declare that this is done in View of something accepted by him as a Satisfaction, the Point will be clear. Our Hope will then become Assurance, and the Difficulty before-mention'd vanish. We shall then be certain Things are so order'd by him, as to magnify at once his Wisdom and his Mercy. But; without such a Declaration, however strong our Hopes may be, they must still have this Allay, that possibly we may be mistaken: The Constitution of Things, to us unknown, may possibly not admit of absolute Pardon; and consequently, on such a Foot, this concerning Question concerning the Pardon of Sin must be perplex'd and doubtful.

*"his goodness  
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his wisdom  
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the evidence  
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*"but where  
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The principal Things alledg'd by this Author in Proof that Pardon must necessarily follow Repentance, may be reduc'd under the following Heads; First, That Sin being the only Ground of God's Displeasure, Repentance must render Men the proper Objects of God's Favour; and consequently, of itself entitle them to Pardon. And, Secondly, That as Repentance is the only End of Punishment, so where this End is obtain'd, Punishment must cease.

The First Argument is thus represented by our Author; "Can any Thing be more evident, than that if doing Evil is the only Foundation of God's Displeasure, ceasing to do Evil, and doing the contrary, must take away that Displeasure? As long as Men continue in their Sins, they must continue the proper Objects of God's Repentment; but when they, forsaking their Sins, act a Part suitable to their rational Nature, they of course become the proper Objects of his Approbation." *p.* 417, 418.

There is Something specious enough in this Argument, which may deceive an unwary Reader. Sin, or the doing Evil, is doubtless the Foundation of God's Displeasure, and the only Foundation of it. So far as this we agree; But then we differ widely as to the Conclusion which he draws from this Principle, *viz.* That ceasing to do Evil, and, doing the contrary, must take away that Displeasure.

Displeasure. It is true indeed, when a Man ceases to do Evil, and does the contrary, his Actions must so far be approv'd by God; so far he is the proper Object of Approbation. His Conduct for the present is right; and consequently, cannot draw on him Divine Displeasure. But all this is foreign to the Point. The Question, is, Not whether acting right for the present be approveable; but whether it be sufficient of itself to remove all Displeasure for having acted wrong formerly.

The Negative must be here maintain'd; and that upon the Principle laid down by this Gentleman, *viz.* That doing Evil is the Foundation of God's Displeasure. If this be true, (as is agreed on both Hands) then the having done Evil is a like Foundation of Displeasure; For a bad Action, which is censurable in the Act, will not cease to be so when it is past.

I cannot but remark, that according to our Author's Way of Arguing, Displeasure for any Sin can continue no longer than the Sin itself is in Act; For, ceasing to do Evil, saith he, must take away that Displeasure. He adds indeed these Words, "Doing the contrary;" but it is evident that These are referr'd to something else, *viz.* The Divine Approbation attainable by Obedience. This surely implies somewhat more than bare Removal of Displeasure. Now if Displeasure  
for



for any Act of Sin must continue no longer than the Sin itself is in Act, what will become of the Divine Sanctions? On this Foot, there can be no Punishments, properly speaking, inflicted at all: For these always carry with them a Retrospect; and import an Evil inflicted on account of an Evil done. Our Author therefore hath carry'd this Matter to an extravagant Length. He attempts to prove, that Repentance must necessarily be attended with full Pardon, by an Argument, which, if it proves any thing at all, must prove at the same Time, that no Punishments for Sin can be at all inflicted; and consequently, that no Sins whatsoever need any Pardon in the least.

This Second Argument to the same Purpose sets forth, That as Repentance is the End of Punishment, so where this End is obtain'd, Punishment must cease. The Fourth Chapter of his Book is principally spent on this Point. He there asserts, "That as it  
" was for the Sake of Man, that he [*i. e.*  
" God] gave him Laws, so he executes  
" them purely for the same Reason. —  
" That even amongst Men none ought to  
" be punish'd, (since what is past can't be  
" help'd,) but to prevent a future Breach of  
" The Law. *p.* 38. — That our greatest  
" Felicity consists in having such an impar-  
" tial and disinterested Judge, as well as Le-  
" gislator, that whether He punishes or re-  
" wards,

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“wards, he acts alike for our Good ; That  
 “being the End of all his Laws, and con-  
 “sequently, of the Penalties as well as Re-  
 “wards which make them Laws. p. 40.  
 “That the Effects of God's Justice, (they  
 “never extending to Annihilation,) must not  
 “only be for the Good of others, but even  
 “of the Persons punish'd. p. 41. — Last-  
 “ly, That all Punishment for Punishment  
 “Sake is mere Cruelty and Malice ;  
 “and consequently, whatever Punishments  
 “God inflicts must be a Mark of his Love.”  
 p. 42.

In these Passages the following Assertions  
 are contain'd ; That Men ought not to be  
 punish'd, but to prevent a future Breach of  
 God's Law : — That therefore all Punish-  
 ments are for the Good of the Person pun-  
 ish'd ; — And, that every thing beyond  
 this is mere Cruelty and Malice. In Oppo-  
 sition to which Assertions I shall endeavour  
 to prove, That the Reformation of the Of-  
 fender is not the only End of Punishment ;  
 — That in many Cases the Execution of  
 Punishments may prove not at all for the  
 Good of the Person punish'd ; — And that  
 the Execution of such is no Argument of  
 Cruelty or Malice.

Punishment is one of the Sanctions of God's  
 Laws ; the great End of which must be, To  
 enforce Obedience to them. Its primary End  
 therefore is, not so much to reform Offences,

as to prevent them. It is threaten'd with this View only: And tho' the Execution of it may promote Ends somewhat different, yet such ought always to be consider'd as subordinate to that great one, which was clearly the original Intention. But, what if Men will not be influenc'd by these Threats? What if they offend even with a View to Mercy? Must Punishment therefore be suspended, and The Divine Threatnings entirely vain? Certainly Laws may, and ought to be supported, whatever the Offender suffer by it; and what may reasonably be threaten'd, may as reasonably be executed.

Be it therefore, that Punishment is executed; yet still the Question remains, whether the Execution of it can have any other End than the Reformation of the Offender; and consequently, whether this End, being once obtain'd, Punishment must not cease of course. To which I reply, That the Execution of Punishment may be intended, not merely to reform the Offender, *i. e.* to bring him out of that bad moral State in which he is at present, but likewise to prevent his relapsing into it, for the future. And if this be the Case, then a present Reformation may not be sufficient to remove Punishment; which, having a farther End, must continue 'till that End itself be gain'd. Tho' after all, the Evil which Men suffer, when consider'd in this View, is not so properly Punishment

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as Discipline. In this manner it is consider'd in Holy Scripture. And consequently, Repentance is so far from being the only End of Punishment, that, strictly speaking, it is no End of it at all.

Yet this I will not insist on at present. I will allow that the Reformation of Offenders may be One End of inflicting Punishment in certain Cases. But will it follow from hence, that it must be the only End of it in all Cases? Will this Gentleman assert, that The Execution of capital Punishment tends to the Reformation of the Offender himself, and is for his Good? — or, if it be not so, it must be absolutely unlawful? On this Foot, What Civil Government can be supported?

But, I shall be told, What have we to do with Civil Punishments, when the Divine only are in View? Right; and I should not have step'd out of my Way, if the Gentleman had kept himself within tolerable Bounds, and had not express'd himself in such a Manner, as to subvert Civil Government itself. However, I will confine myself to those Penalties, which are properly Divine Sanctions. Concerning which I must assert, That the Execution of them may serve for general Example, and to contain other Persons beside the Sufferer within the Bounds of Duty. The Honour and Authority of Laws are then supported, when the Obedience of some is secur'd by the Punishment of others. This will

will easily be allow'd to be a nobler and more extensive End, than the mere Reformation of the Offender himself; and consequently, to be more fit and proper to be pursu'd.

Suppose this The Case; Suppose a Man is punish'd for a Terror to others: Is this Punishment then for the Offender's Good? why, Yes, perhaps our Gentleman will reply; Both Ends, to wit, the private Good of the Offender, and the publick Good of Mankind may be pursu'd at once, Admitting this likewise; yet must The Punishment cease as soon as One End, viz. The Offender's own Good is obtain'd? And must no farther Regard be had to that more extensive End, the Terror of others? And if Regard must likewise be had to This, must not the Punishment continue 'till this End likewise be sufficiently obtained? The Consequence is plain; a Man may, consistently with the just Rules of Government, be punish'd beyond what is necessary for his own mere Amendment; and therefore, may suffer Punishments, which are not for his own Good at all.

But our Author still goes on, and says, This is mere Cruelty and Malice, All Punishment for Punishment Sake must be so: And what he means by this is explain'd just after, when he infers from hence, "What ever Punishment God inflicts, must be a Mark of his Love." — Of his Love: — To whom? To the Offender; for so it follows,



follows, — “ in not suffering his Creatures  
“ to remain in that miserable State, which  
“ is inseperable from Sin and Wickedness,  
p. 42.

To inflict Punishments which are not mere  
Marks of Love to the Offender, is, says he,  
mere Cruelty and Malice. If this be the  
Case, then all Punishment, consider'd as such,  
must be Cruelty; For, consider'd in this  
View, it hath respect only to a Sin commit-  
ted; of which it is the proper Effect and  
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Put the Case, that in the first Appoint-  
ment of Things God had order'd, That a  
certain Course, in itself fit and proper, should  
be follow'd by certain Advantages, and the  
contrary by proportionable Sufferings, over  
and above what should necessarily arise from  
natural Constitution: Suppose likewise that  
he had given Men Intimations of this: On  
this Foot, Men would have their Choice;  
Life or Death, Happiness or Misery would  
be set before them: Let us now suppose,  
that Man obstinately pursues what he  
knows will be attended with Misery; Is it  
Cruelty to let him have his Choice?

If this be affirm'd, let us see how Matters  
will stand in Affairs relating to the natural  
Order of Things. Temperance and Sobriety  
strengthen the Constitution, and promote  
Health: On the other Hand, Intemperance  
impairs both; and Things may be carry'd  
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so far, that no After-wisdom, no Repentance and Amendment shall be able to repair the Loss. Is this Constitution wrong? or, is God, in such a Case, concern'd to break thro' the settled Course, and to remove the Evil a Man hath foolishly brought on himself? These Things cannot be affirm'd. What Wisdom hath ordain'd, it is the Concern of Wisdom to support. Goodness and Mercy are here entirely out of the Question; which (as I noted before) cannot require any thing inconsistent with Wisdom.

In this I am supported by a remarkable Assertion of our Author himself: "These [i. e. Justice and Mercy] oblige not God  
" either to punish or to pardon any farther  
" than his infinite Wisdom sees fit." p. 41.  
The Question therefore, on this Foot, will be, whether Wisdom requires, that no Offender should be punish'd but for his own Good; or rather, whether it doth not much more require he should be punish'd for the Terror of others: The Question, I say, is, Whether the Nature of Government, and consequently the Wisdom of its Administration, doth not require this: And if it doth, then Punishment may be inflicted with a View to publick Service; And to do so, is not to act with Cruelty but Wisdom; In short, 'tis to act in a Way, which the Offender must approve, at the same Time he suffers.

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A Gentleman indeed, suppos'd to be the same with the Author I am now dealing with, in his *Second Address to the Inhabitants of London and Westminster*, endeavours to carry the Matter somewhat farther; asserting, "That the Wisdom of God will oblige him to forgive the Penitent." This is something: But then, How does he make it good? Why, thus; "He then becomes what God in his Wisdom requires him to be; and it would be Cruelty and Rage, not Wisdom and Justice, to afflict him unnecessarily." To which he adds, "Punishment hath never a Retrospect, (for what is past cannot be helped); but is design'd only to prevent the like for the future." p. 7.

By Repentance, i. e. a present State of Obedience after Transgression, Man is what God's Wisdom requires he should be now; and therefore, to be sure, no Punishments can be laid on him upon That Account: Such would be inconsistent with Justice and Wisdom. But will a present Obedience prove that he hath always obey'd? And may not a Man be liable to suffer, as well for a past as a present Disobedience? Why, No, says he; what is past cannot be help'd. This is true indeed; But if this be an Objection against punishing past Transgressions, it equally holds against all Punishment whatsoever: For no Transgressions can be punish'd 'till

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they are committed; and as soon as they are once committed, they are past and irrecoverable. So far is This from being true, "Punishment has never any Retrospect," that the very Nature of Punishment necessarily carries us back to a foregoing Crime.

Well; but he will tell us, the Stress of his Argument lies in another Point, viz. That by Repentance Man becomes what God would have him be; and therefore, to afflict him, in such a Case, would be to afflict him unnecessarily. — But how doth this Consequence appear? May not the Support of Government and Laws make this necessary? May not common Good, and the general Enforcement of Obedience, require it? If this prove the Case, such a Person would not be afflicted unnecessarily. For tho' no Necessity should be suppos'd to arise from the present Condition of the Offender, yet it is sufficient for our Purpose, if it be found to arise from the Condition of the World.

To conclude this Point; Forasmuch as Punishment is one of the Sanctions of God's Laws, the primary Design of which must be, To enforce Obedience to them; it follows, If it be consistent with Justice and Goodness to make this Sanction at first, it must equally be so to execute it. But then, how far it is necessary to deal either with Tenderness or Rigour, and to grant or to withhold a Pardon, is a Point which Wisdom only can determine.



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# REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 131

determine; For Goodness and Mercy can never determine on one Side, whilst Wisdom takes the other. To know therefore How far Men can assuredly depend on absolute Pardon, upon Repentance, they must know all the Measures of Divine, *i. e.* Infinite Wisdom; which being above Human Reason, Nothing can, in That way, be prov'd, Hope Men did, and reasonably might; But we are not now speaking of Hope, but Assurance. Upon the Strength of this we must affirm, That as Human Reason cannot give us full Assurance of Pardon upon our Repentance, so it fails in one of the most important Articles, whereby the Interest of Virtue in the present State of Things must be supported.

I shall have less Occasion to enlarge on my next Point, *viz.* That considering the present Corruption of Human Nature, a tolerable Reformation cannot be expected without extraordinary Assistance: The Assurance of this is one of the greatest Encouragements to set about it heartily; and without it, few will have Courage enough to attempt any Thing of Moment.

On this Part of mine Argument Two Things are to be consider'd. 1. The Usefulness and Expediency of some extraordinary Assistance, for carrying on the Interests of Virtue. And, in the next Place, The Impossibility of proving, on the Foot of mere natural Reason, that such Assistance will be

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## 132 A DEFENCE of

given us. The later Point will be readily granted by our Adversaries; and therefore we have Nothing to do but to evince the former.

Now, I shall desire nothing to be allow'd me here, but what is plain and known Matter of Fact; Nothing but what must be granted by every Man, who will consider either what happens abroad, or passes within his own Mind at home. That there are a great Number of Temptations to turn aside from the Rules of Righteousness; That there is a strange Proneness in the Temper and Disposition of Mankind, to comply with these Temptations; That there are Affections and Passions, which 'tis difficult to keep within due Bounds; That however various these may be in different Men, yet every one is in some Particular or other liable to be govern'd by them; That Education, Custom, Way of Life, and the like, do strengthen and confirm these Dispositions; and as They render immoral Acts agreeable for the present, must throw great Difficulties in the Ways of Obedience: All this, I say, must be allow'd me. Upon this Foot I argue, That without Something more than mere Philosophy can suggest to us, we cannot expect any great Matters to be perform'd. For, however it may be suppos'd, that human Wisdom would be sufficient, were Men in an equal Poise between Virtue and Vice; yet  
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what can This do, when Men are influenc'd by such Desires, as they know not how to contradict? In such a Case, Reason and the Sense of Duty, if they cannot influence Men, will but aggravate their Misfortune; since they must reproach them for having done what they had not Resolution enough to forbear.

The Gentleman I am arguing against, frequently tells us of the Frailty and Imperfection of Man. What is this but a Confession of the Point I am contending for? If Men are really so exceeding frail, and unapt either to attend to Duty, or to prosecute it with Resolution; what great Matters can be expected? In this State of Things somewhat must be done, either to destroy Temptations, or to enable Men to conquer them. If therefore The Supreme Being shall, in great Compassion, encourage us by the Promise of his own Assistance; if every Person, who is sincerely willing to attempt his Recovery, shall have Assurance that his Attempts will not be vain, — then a Foundation will be laid for prosecuting this Point with Vigour: In such a Case no Difficulties will be sufficient to discourage Men; For they may consider that *God's Strength will be made perfect in Weakness.* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

The Conclusion from hence is manifest; Forasmuch as the State of Things is such, that something more is expedient as a Means

of Virtue, than mere Human Reason can furnish us withal; and forasmuch as the Law or Religion of Nature can reach no farther than Human Reason can carry us, This Law or Religion must so far fail; and therefore is not, as This Author contends, absolutely perfect.

Before I quit this Subject, it will be proper to examine what this Gentleman hath advanced on the other Side. His Arguments are loosely scatter'd in several Parts of his Book: But the whole Amount of them may be reduc'd to these Three Points;

1. The Law of Nature proceeds from God, who is absolutely wise and perfect.

2. It is the Rule whereby we must judge concerning the Perfection of every other Law.

3. It is that Law whereby the most perfect Being directs and governs his own Actions.

1. The Law of Nature must be an absolutely perfect Law, because it proceeds from God, who is infinitely Wise and Perfect. Thus, p. 3. "A. If God from the Beginning gave Man a Religion, I ask, Was that Religion perfect, or imperfect? B. Most perfect, no doubt; since no Religion can come from a Being of infinite Wisdom and Perfection, but what is absolutely perfect."

The same Way of Reasoning occurs again, p. 8, 20, 60, 283, besides several other

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Places. Our Author, we see, lays no small Stress on it. But whether it really deserves such Regard, shall be consider'd immediately.

The Law of Nature is, without Doubt, The Law of God; and without supposing it to be so, we shall be unable to prove it strictly obligatory, *i. e.* To be properly speaking any Law at all.

We admit, in the next Place, That God cannot prescribe imperfectly. If He gives us Laws, these must be perfect, or suited to the Ends for which they were given. The Law of Nature therefore is perfect in its Kind; and will answer those Purposes, which a Law of That Kind can answer. But it will not follow from hence, that it is absolutely perfect, and incapable of any Addition whatsoever. Every Species of Creatures is perfect; — perfect, I mean, in its Kind; But who will assert, that any One Species is absolutely perfect, and incapable of receiving any farther Degrees of Excellence? The same which I have observ'd concerning the Creatures of God's Power, will equally hold as to the Prescriptions of his Will. They are both perfect in their Kind: But as the One, when compar'd with more noble Creatures, may be said to be relatively imperfect, so may the other likewise, when compar'd with more excellent Dispensations.



I have observ'd before, that The Law of Nature cannot be more perfect than our Reason itself is; because it cannot reach farther than our Reason itself can carry us. Had God therefore created us with lower Degrees of Reason than what we now enjoy, our Nature would still have been in its Kind perfect; and the Law, which our Reason must, in such a Case, have taught us, would, in this Sense, have been perfect likewise. But would it have been as perfect, or so extensive as it is at present? No certainly: Several Things fitting and proper, and which are now plain and evident, would then have escap'd our Notice. Should God add to us any new Faculties, new Measures of Duty would arise: Our Obligations would be different; and The Law of Nature enlarg'd: Additions would, in such a Case, be made to it. And if this be true, then The Law of Nature, as it now subsists, neither is, nor can be, absolutely perfect.

Nor doth this at all derogate from the Wisdom and Perfection of The Supreme Being, the Author of this Law. For the Defects of it arise, not from the Nature of God, but of the Creature. This Law hath a Power of obliging, *i. e.* it is properly a Law, just so far as Men do or may see the Reasons and Fittests of Things. It fails therefore on this Account only, because Men themselves are deficient and imperfect.

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In the original State of Purity and Excellence, in which Man was at first created, I question not but it reach'd to every thing morally fit for Man, in these Circumstances to do. But, when our Nature became corrupt, the Understanding being darken'd, and the Will perverted, *i. e.* when Men had sunk beneath themselves, then this Law itself suffer'd likewise. From that Time forward, The Law of Nature, and The Rule of Fitness were no longer commensurate to each other; and the former fell short of the later, in Proportion as human Capacities chang'd to be impair'd.

If it be said, That God was concern'd to preserve his own Laws in their original Extent, by preventing such Corruptions in human Nature as should be prejudicial to them; — This is rather a bold Presumption what God ought to have done, than a proving what He actually hath done. And besides, if any Allowance should be made to the Argument, it may be turn'd, I conceive, to our Advantage; as shewing, How fit and proper it was for The Supreme Being to aid the Imperfections of our Reason; and to restore and reinforce that Law, by a special Revelation, which was in a great Degree lost thro' Ignorance and Error.

2. The Second Argument is This; The Law of Nature is the Rule by which we must judge concerning the Perfection of every other Law;

Law; and consequently must be absolutely perfect itself. His Words are These; "If  
 " This Law [*i. e.* The Law of Nature] is  
 " the Test of the Perfection of any written  
 " Law, must not that be the most perfect  
 " Law, by which the Perfection of all others  
 " is to be try'd?" p. 199.

If the Gentleman, by Law of Nature in this Place, means, that System of moral Principles and Precepts, which is by us discoverable in the Use of Reason, we shall easily see the Fallacy of his Argument; And if he intends any thing else, there is a manifest Inconsistency in his Method of Proceeding. This Law, says he, is the Test of the Perfection of any written Law: But, To whom is it such a Test? — To Men certainly. Now if this be true, then it is evident, he must intend, by Law of Nature, just so much as the Person, who uses this Test, is Master of: For no Man can examine the Truth of a Proposition by any Principles, to which he is an entire Stranger. The Question therefore, is This; Whether this Law, as being the suppos'd Test of every other Law, be, for that Reason, absolutely perfect? I conceive, Not; and this will appear from considering How far, and in What Sense, other Laws are to be try'd by it.

Thus much is evident, that as nothing can possibly be true, which is really inconsistent with a self-evident or demonstrated Truth,

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so nothing can possibly be the Will of God by Revelation, which is contradictory to the Will of the same God manifested by Reason. What is evidently requir'd, from considering the Natures of Things, cannot possibly be forbidden by Revelation; and so, what is manifestly forbidden in the former way, cannot possibly be requir'd in the later. The Province of Reason is, in this Case, to judge, not whether an acknowledg'd Law is to be receiv'd or rejected, but whether something propos'd to us as a Divine Law, be really such or no. And even here we judge by our Reason, not *absolutely* whether it ought to be rejected or not, but only just so far, as the Test whereby we try it, reaches. For, when we are got beyond this, we are unable to prove any thing either way; and therefore, since Nothing can be sufficiently prov'd from the Nature of the Thing, as far as it appears to us, we call for Proof from external Evidence. It is plain then, that our Law of Nature, or the moral Principles and Precepts which our Reason teaches, however it may be admitted as a Test, yet is not any absolute Test, whereby every Law propos'd must be try'd. And if it be a Test only in a limited Sense, then we cannot infer its absolute Perfection from the present Argument.

Put the Case, that Men have no other Rule or Test to judge by: This hath been, and still is the Case in many Parts of the World.

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In such Circumstances they are concern'd, no doubt, to make the best Use of it they can; and shall accordingly be acquitted or condemn'd by God, as they adhere to, or deviate from this Rule. But will it follow from hence, that because this is the best, indeed the only Rule they have, it is therefore absolutely perfect? By no means: And for the same Reason, our Author would maintain the absolute Perfection of this Law, *viz.* That it is the only Test such Men have of moral and religious Matters; we may assert likewise, that the Senses of Brutes are absolutely perfect; For these likewise are Their only Test of outward and sensible Objects.

3. Our Author endeavours to evince the same Point by a Third Argument, *viz.* This is The Law by which God directs his own Actions; and consequently it must be absolutely perfect. "I am surpriz'd, says he, to find The Doctor, [*i. e.* Dr. Clark] arguing as tho' that Law, which is a most perfect Rule to the most perfect Being, is not perfect enough for his imperfect Creatures; tho' their whole Perfection consists in imitating him, and governing their Actions by the same Rule." p. 398. Two Things are here affirm'd; 1. That The Law of Nature is the most perfect Rule to the most perfect Being. And, 2. That our whole Perfection consists in imitating God, and governing our Actions by the same Rule.

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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 141

Since this Gentleman affirms, that the Law of Nature is the most perfect Rule to the most perfect Being, I must remind him of his own Definition of the Term, with which he set out in his Second Chapter. There he declares expressly, "By Natural Religion I understand the Belief of a God, and the Sense and Practice of those Duties which result from the Knowledge we, *by our Reason*, have of him and his Perfections, &c." Now is This really the most perfect Rule to the most perfect Being? Is human Knowledge the Measure of the Divine? And are these Rules, even the most compleat Collection of them we are able to frame; Are these, I say, the exact and adequate Measures of The Divine Conduct? If not, Why does this Gentleman change the State of the Question? and when he is debating concerning the Perfection of that Law of Nature, which human Knowledge is capable of discovering, Why does he tell us, that the Rule by which God directs his own Actions is absolutely perfect? This is arguing entirely beside the Purpose; and may serve as well to prove any other Proposition as This.

The Rule of God's Actions is indeed an absolutely perfect Rule. But our Law of Nature may, and certainly does, fall vastly short of it. The former is the Rule which a perfectly wise Being sets himself. The later



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The Rule of God's Actions is indeed an absolutely perfect Rule. But our Law of Nature may, and certainly does, fall vastly short of it. The former is the Rule which a perfectly wise Being sets himself. The later

later is the Rule, which weak and imperfect Creatures are able to discover: And therefore these must differ as much from each other as Infinite from Finite; or Divine Wisdom from Human Ignorance.

Nor is the Second Position in this Argument true, *viz.* That our whole Perfection consists in imitating God, and governing our Actions by the same Rule by which He governs his. It is true indeed, there are several general Rules common to The Supreme Being and his intelligent Creatures; such as are the Rules of Justice, Goodness, and the like. But even here, many Things may be Instances of Justice or Goodness in the One, which will not be so in the Other; And God hath a Right to do, what Man can have no Right to imitate.

The Reason of this is clear. The State and Condition of The Supreme Being is infinitely different from ours; and Therefore what is fit and proper for him, may be unfit and improper for us. A Magistrate may take away a Life, not only with Innocence, but Praise; which to do, in a private Subject, would be Murther. We must conclude therefore, that human Perfection cannot consist in imitating God simply, but only so far as our Condition will make His Actions imitable by us.

And if our Perfection doth not consist in imitating God simply, much less can it be affirm'd



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affirm'd that our whole Perfection consists in it. If this were the Case, What would become of Obedience to God? For I cannot conceive but the moral Perfection of the Creature, must imply an absolute Subjection to the Creator: What again, would become of Patience, Temperance, Sobriety? Virtues surely which carry with them some Perfection in Beings compounded of an animal, as well as a rational Part. These are Perfections proper to us: Things in which we cannot possibly imitate God; and therefore our whole Perfection cannot possibly consist in an Imitation of him.

In short; The Rule of Fitness with regard to God is One Thing; and the Rule of Fitness with regard to Creatures is another. The Rule of the Divine Actions is, no doubt, an absolutely perfect Rule; But this, I have observ'd, in many Instances, cannot reach to us at all. And with regard to us, we ought always to distinguish between a Rule of Fitness, and a Law of Duty. The Fitness of Things will be to us a Law, just so far as we are capable of knowing it, and no farther. And when we are treating concerning the Law of Nature, as we ought to understand by it what is to us properly a Law, so it is evident, the Perfection of this Law must reach just so far as the Perfection of our rational Faculties reaches; which, if they come short  
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of absolute Perfection, the Rule or Law discover'd by them must do so likewise. Any other absolutely perfect Law of Nature with regard to us, an imaginary Thing, subsists no where, but in the Mind of Him who is absolutely perfect.



CHAP.



CHAP. III.

*Whether The Law or Religion of Nature be immutable, in such a Sense especially, as to be incapable of admitting any additional Precepts.*



FROM the absolute Perfection of The Law or Religion of Nature, our Author proceeds to infer, that it must be incapable of any Kind of Alteration, incapable of Addition or Diminution, and as immutable as The Author of it. Can Revelation therefore, says he, add any Thing to a Religion absolutely perfect, universal, and immutable? "p. 3, 4. We see in these Words" his Application of the Principle before examin'd. If the Religion of Nature be absolutely perfect, it must be immutable; it can admit of no Addition or Diminution; and consequently, God cannot require any thing by Revelation, which was

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*This fallacious application is the only ground he builds upon.*

not antecedently requir'd by The Law of Nature.

But, what if this Law be not absolutely perfect? Then, I hope, it may be capable of some Additions; and certain Things may become Duties by Revelation, which were not so before.

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This Point concerning the Immutability of the Law of Nature, may be necessary to be stated clearly; not only because our Author builds much upon it, but likewise, because the gross Denial of a Doctrine, generally allow'd, may perhaps give Cause of Offence to serious and good Men. And yet, since I have explain'd myself so distinctly in my first Chapter, and shewn, that by Law of Nature nothing more should be understood, than such a Collection of moral Principles and Precepts as human Reason teaches; after this, I say, it may be hoped, that no Difficulties will arise on this Head. For, if the Extent of this Law must be measur'd by Human Reason, the Law itself cannot be more immutable than Human Reason itself is: It must vary as Human Reason itself does; and be capable of the very same Additions or Diminutions.

There are indeed Two Senses in which the Expression is sometimes used. It either signifies a perfect Collection of all those moral Principles and Precepts which have a Foundation in the Nature and Reason of Things; or else, such a one as we are capable of mak-

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ing in the Use of Reason. In the later Sense it is plainly mutable; and of this every one must be conscious, who considers that his Duty is daily enlarg'd, as he makes greater Improvements in moral Science. And, as to the former, tho' it be not properly to us a Law, yet if it were so, I question whether it would be found immutable, as contended for by this Author.

The Law, in this View, takes in every Thing which is morally fit to be done; yet still it cannot be more immutable than those Fitnesses are on which it is founded; nor these Fitnesses, than the Relations in which Men stand to other Beings; nor these Relations, than the Beings are which are thus related. Any considerable Change here may affect the whole in some Degree; may produce new Relations, new Fitnesses; and, upon that Account, become the Ground of new Duties. If one Relation be destroy'd, the Law which before subsisted, will suffer Diminution; and if a new Relation arises, it must admit Addition.

I know it is frequently maintain'd by very learned Writers, that The Law of Nature is immutable; And the Assertion, when rightly understood, is true. What is fit and right, must be agreeable to the Will of God: And what He, upon that Account, wills at one Time, He must will for ever, The State and Condition of Things still continuing in every

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respect the same. Virtue and Vice are not merely arbitrary Things. What is morally fit and proper, is virtuous; what is morally unfit and improper, vicious: And the same Wise and Good Being, who constituted Nature in such a manner, that this Fitness or Unfitness should immediately result from it, must intend that every Intelligent Being, as far as he is capable of discerning these Things, should act agreeably. Had Men existed in any other Part of infinite Duration, under the same Circumstances as They do at present, as the same Actions would have been fit or unfit, so the same Precepts must have constituted their Rule or Law. And should human Kind continue to exist, as they do now, in any supposable Portions of Futurity, the same Rules must still continue; and The Supreme Being must exact a Conformity to them, as far as Men shall be capable of knowing them. In this Sense, and this only, can it be maintain'd, that The Law of Nature is eternal and unchangeable. It is eternal and unchangeable upon Supposition that Things always were, and always will be, in the same State and Condition, and no otherwise; For, if any considerable Changes happen in these, a proportionable Change must likewise follow in the Rule of Fitness, and, consequently, in the Law of Nature.

It is frequently suppos'd by This Writer, that the Condition of human Nature, as far as Morality

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Morality is concern'd, hath always been, and ever must continue as it is at present: I shall therefore assign Three very remarkable States, with the consequent Alterations from the one to the other; and point out some of the more obvious Changes in the Rule of Conduct which must result from thence.

And, First, it is very certain that Man came originally from the Hands of God pure and innocent; with such a Sufficiency of intellectual Powers, and such a Ballance of the Affections and Passions, as might answer the original Purpose of his Creation. That such a State there once was, cannot be disputed by this Author, who contends that this is still the Condition of our Nature. In such a State, as Man's intellectual Abilities must be suppos'd to reach to every thing by which he might answer the End of his Being, so his Law of Nature or Scheme of Duty must be equally extensive. And as his Affections and Passions were nicely ballanc'd, so no Abatements could be pleaded for the least Deviation from this Rule. Such a Perfection of his Condition, must require a like Perfection in his Obedience. Still, as Man was free, and his Perfections, however great, yet were not absolute or unlimited, it was possible he might one Time or other transgress; which, if it should prove the Case, we are concern'd to search the Consequence.



The first Thing which must follow, is, He must be obnoxious to Punishment. In the next Place, His Transgression may be of such a Kind, as to diminish both his intellectual and moral Abilities; To cloud his Reason; To dissipate his Thoughts; and to inflame his Passions: So that he shall not only be fill'd with Anxiety for what is past, and Fears of what is to come, but likewise find the Return to Duty difficult and painful. It may happen, Lastly, That his very Frame and Constitution shall be disorder'd to such a Degree, as to be propagated in the very same manner to Posterity; From whence it may follow, That Human Nature, which was at first pure, shall become corrupted; and Man neither capable of discovering every thing fit and proper to be done, nor yet dispos'd to practise uniformly what is known.

This leads me to consider a Second State of Human Nature; which is by no means imaginary, but the real Condition in which it subsists at present. This then is a State of Corruption; And as every Man hath, in Consequence of this, gone off from the known Rules of Duty, it is likewise a State of Guilt. Upon account of his Corruption, (that Part of it, I mean, which relates to the Defects of his Understanding) the proper Rules of Conduct will be less open to him, and so far as this, his very Law itself will be impair'd; But then in another Respect a new Duty must arise;

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arise; As He is a Sinner, Repentance is necessary, which was impossible in a State of Innocence. Under Repentance I do here comprehend, Sorrow for Sin, Supplication for Pardon, and Resolution of Amendment; all which, as they do necessarily arise from our present Circumstances, so must they likewise require every other Particular, which may serve to promote and finish our Repentance. Who does not see, that, in this View of Things, the Rule of human Conduct must be somewhat different from what it would have been, had Men continued in their original Perfection, and maintain'd their Innocence inviolate?

Let us suppose then, upon Mens sincere Endeavours to discharge their Duty, that God shall accept them, pardon their Transgressions, and receive them to Favour: In a Word, after removing them into another World, shall bestow on them those Rewards, which were originally intended them. This will bring on a Third State, by Divines term'd a State of Glory. In this, however it should be suppos'd, that the Relation between God and Man, as Creator and Creature, and between all other intelligent Beings as Fellow Creatures, still subsisting, the Rule of Conduct must so far be invariably the same; yet other Relations being alter'd, the Result of them must vary likewise. Tho', as *St. Paul* tells us, *Charity never faileth*, (1 Cor. xiii. 8.) yet Faith

and Hope, as Instruments only for the Attainment of Perfection in the present Life, must cease hereafter. When the Ties of Civil Society shall be dissolv'd, all the Duties arising from them must fail of course; several new Engagements, founded on the then State of Things, must succeed, of which we have no distinct Conceptions now; And whether Men may not advance infinitely in Degrees of Perfection, be always acquiring new Relations, and still enlarging their Duties to all Eternity, is a Point, which as it cannot be certainly evinc'd on the one hand, so neither can it be clearly disprov'd on the other.

Yet be this Matter as it will: Supposing The Law of Nature to be as immutable as this Author contends; all that can follow from it is, That The Law of Nature, as such, will be incapable of Addition or Diminution; *i. e.* nothing which was once a Part of this Law, will ever cease to be so; and nothing can ever in Time become a Part of this Law, which was not such always. If all this were allow'd the Gentleman, I cannot see what Advantage he can make of it. For, can any Conclusions be drawn from hence to prove, that no other Law can possibly be given us? Will it follow, that God cannot command any thing else; cannot exercise our Obedience by any one Particular, which Reason doth not shew to have been our Duty always?

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This indeed is strenuously contended for by our Author, who hath spent no small Part of his Book on this very Point. "The Question, says he, is, Whether God, who for many Ages did not command or forbid any Thing but what was moral or immoral; nor yet does so to the greatest Part of Mankind, has, in some Places, and some Cases, broke into the Rule of his own Conduct, and issu'd out certain Commands which have no Foundation in Reason, by obliging Men to observe such Things as would not oblige, were they not impos'd; or, if the Imposition was taken off, would immediately return to their primitive Indifference? — To suppose then such Commands, is it not to suppose God acts arbitrarily, and commands for commanding Sake? Can such Commands be the Effect of infinite Wisdom and Goodness?" p. 116. Here then he asserts, that such Commands cannot be given us, because they cannot proceed from infinite Wisdom and Goodness. Not content with this, he advances a Step farther; and maintains, it would be Tyranny in God to require any Thing of a positive Nature. "Can so kind and tender a Parent as God play The Tyrant, and impose Commands on us, which do not flow from the Relations we stand in to him and one another?" p. 30. And as tho' he had not yet carry'd the Matter high enough, in another Place



Place he tells us, that in giving Precepts, God must deal with us, just as one Man does by another; *i. e.* not by dictating and prescribing to him without assigning the Reason of the Precept, but “only by proposing Arguments to convince his Understanding and influence his Will; — For, to go beyond this, would be making Impressions on Man as a Seal does on Wax, to the confounding his Reason and Liberty in chusing.” p. 199.

As this is a favourite Point with our Author, and of considerable Moment in the present Debate, I shall consider it distinctly; and, to make the Matter clearer, shall,

1. State the Question; — In the next Place propose such Arguments as seem proper to determine it; — and then examine the principal Objections alledg'd by our Author.

The Question itself is set forth to us under different Terms, as it occurs in different Parts of this Author's Performance. Sometimes he demands, “Whether God can give us Precepts not founded in Reason? — Sometimes — “Precepts concerning Things which would not oblige unless they were impos'd; — Sometimes — “Precepts concerning Things indifferent; — And sometimes again — “Precepts positive.” I take it his Doctrine is most fully represented under this last Expression; and therefore I shall

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shall chuse to propose the Question Thus, Whether *positive* Precepts can proceed from God?

My First Remark, in order to state The Question, shall be this; The Term Positive may be understood either in a *relative*, or else in an *absolute* Sense.

Positive Precepts, in the former Sense, are those, which however founded in the real Natures and Reasons of Things, yet to Persons unacquainted with their proper Grounds, must appear to be founded in the mere Will and Authority of the Imposer. These, whatever they may be in themselves, are to them positive; and those who observe them, must act entirely on the Authority of the Prescriber.

By positive, in the later Sense, I mean those Precepts, which are not founded in the Reasons of Things; Matters which we are concern'd about, not in virtue of any Principles antecedent to the Command, but purely in Consequence of the Command itself; and therefore, as they owe all their Force to express Command, so when that ceases, all Concern of ours about them must cease likewise.

I must observe, in the next Place, with reference to this later Sense of the Term Positive, that it excludes either those Reasons only which are of a *moral* Kind, or those likewise which are *natural*. By the one I would be understood to mean That Fitness or Unfitness of Things, upon account of which  
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we term Actions virtuous or vicious; By the other, those temporal Advantages or Disadvantages, Conveniences or Inconveniences, which arise from certain Actions. These, tho' in Fact they more frequently determine Men than moral Reasons are found to do, yet are in Truth of an inferior Kind; And he who foregoes an Advantage, or incurs a Disadvantage, hath a very different Sense of it, on the Reflection, from what That Person feels, who performs a worthy Action, or is guilty of a base one. The one may be the Rule of private Prudence or of Civil Policy; The other, as manifesting a Divine Command, is the Ground of strict and proper Duty.

Over and above what hath hitherto been noted, we should observe besides, that a Distinction may be made between Means and Ends, and this principally with reference to moral Reasons. By moral Ends, I understand those Actions, which being immediately suited to the Relations in which we stand, have no reference to any other Actions of a moral Kind; and by Means, those which only conduce to promote and forward what I have above call'd moral Ends; which, as they are more nearly or more remotely connected with them, must be esteem'd of greater or less Importance.

Of these likewise there are some, which on proper Occasions, do naturally conduce to the

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the Practice of Virtue. I would instance in Self-denial: This serves to give us a more entire Command over ourselves, and enables us the better to keep within proper Bounds. Others conduce to this End, not thro' any natural Efficacy, but merely in Consequence of Institution and Appointment. Thus, that reverent Posture, which is used in Prayer, serves to promote Devotion; not indeed by any necessary Connexion with the Duty, but purely as such a Posture is appointed to express Humility.

Those Means which naturally conduce to moral Ends, are, proportionably as they conduce to them, of moral Consideration; and as the Ends at which they are aim'd ought to be chosen by us, so those Means should likewise be chosen, as naturally conducive to those Ends. But the Case is somewhat different in reference to instituted Means. These, as having no necessary Connexion with the Practice of Virtue, are strictly Positive. Other Means might possibly have been appointed equally serviceable to their Ends; and consequently other Means may be prescrib'd to us, equally consistent with Fitness and the Reason of Things.

These Remarks having been offer'd, in order to state this Point more clearly, I shall pass on to shew what I think myself concern'd to maintain.

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I do assert therefore, in the first Place, That God may give us Positive Commands, in the relative Sense of that Expression; or, That he may require us to perform or abstain from certain Actions, without assigning the proper Grounds and Reasons of the Command. Such, for Instance, The Precept given to our first Parents, in reference to the Tree of Good and Evil, seems to be. I shall not presume to determine Whether there might not be some poisonous Quality in the Fruit which occasion'd the Command: Perhaps there might: But yet, in the Injunction given to our first Parents, nothing of this appears; and therefore, their Observance of it must have been resolv'd rather into the absolute Authority of the Commander, than any appearing Reason of the Command.

I do assert, in the next Place, that God may give Men Precepts not founded in the moral Reasons of Things; Precepts relating to Matters which are not to be consider'd as moral Ends, or as moral necessary Means; and, the Matter of which is not originally fit, nor immediately connected with Things which are so. And yet I must maintain, that even in such Cases as these the Precepts given may not be without a Reason. The Point requir'd may have a reference to some moral End; and contribute to it, tho' not from the Reason and Nature of Things, yet in virtue of positive Appointment. This probably was the

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the Ground of several Institutions in the Jewish Law. They were impos'd as Signs and Tokens; and having once receiv'd a Signification this way, the Use of them did properly suggest the Things signify'd.

Beyond this I must observe farther, that Precepts which are not founded on moral Reasons, nor have any reference to Matters of that Nature, may yet be built on Reasons of Convenience; may contribute to some natural Advantages, or serve to guard against Inconvenience and Disadvantage. This perhaps may be observ'd likewise in some Articles of The Jewish Law: And the Precept in relation to Swine's Flesh, (if the eating it subjected The Jews to greater Inconveniences than were incident to other People) may not improperly be rank'd under this Head.

I must advance a Step farther, and assert, that such positive Precepts may proceed from God, as exclude not only moral, but likewise natural Reasons, in the Sense before given to these Words; or, That God may consistently with his Attributes enjoin those Things, which are indifferent both in a moral and a natural View. We have an Instance of this in the Case of *Naaman*, who was requir'd, as a Condition of being cur'd of his Leprosy, to wash seven times in the River *Jordan*. [2 Kings v. 10.] No Question can arise whether there were any moral Fitness in this Action. And if it be suggested, that possibly there might be

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be some natural Virtue in these Waters, we may still demand, What natural Virtue could there be in Numbers? Why was *Naaman* requir'd to wash rather seven, than ten times? or, What Reason of either Kind can be assign'd why one Number should be preferr'd to another?

But what then! will This Gentleman return upon us; Doth not God, in such a Case, act *arbitrarily*? “and if He acts arbitrarily “in any one Instance, He must or may do “so in all.” p. 124.

What is here suggested, is built on an equivocal Use of the Word *arbitrary*; The Term may be understood in different Senses; and is frequently so used by this Writer himself. Now thus much I do readily allow, If God may act *arbitrarily* in any one Instance, He may do so in any other Instance, the Word being understood in the same determin'd Sense of it. But I do deny this Consequence, if the Sense and Meaning of the Term be vary'd. What I have noted will be clearer, by pointing out the several Significations of the Word in reference to our present Purpose.

*Arbitrary* sometimes implies an acting contrary to the moral Reasons and Fittestnesses of Things. But here I do affirm, in as strong Terms as this Writer, That God is by no means arbitrary. He neither doth, nor possibly can deviate from the Rules of Righteousness;



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ness; and in this Sense doth nothing by mere absolute Will.

At other times it signifies an acting without regard to moral Reasons, where they are properly a Rule. Here likewise I do affirm, that God cannot act arbitrarily. Those things which are morally fit, must be the Objects of Divine Approbation; those which are morally unfit, must be condemn'd by him. The eternal and necessary Rectitude of his Nature requires it.

But then there is another Sense of the Word, in which I may, and do, affirm, that God is Arbitrary; that he may act by mere Will and Pleasure; and must do so, if he acts at all. I mean in those Cases, where the before-mention'd Reasons of Things are entirely unconcern'd, and cannot come into Question.

Thus, whether God should create the World in this or that Point of Duration, — in this or that Part of Space, is in itself perfectly indifferent. And yet, if it were ever created at all, it must have been produc'd in some particular time, and some determin'd Space. To affirm therefore roundly, that God cannot do any thing by arbitrary Will, is inconsistent with his having created the World; and will carry Men not merely into Deism, but into Atheism itself.

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Thus again, in reference to the Divine Commands, I do assert, that where the moral and natural Reasons of Things are out of Question, and therefore incapable of being a Rule, God may prescribe arbitrarily, and command (if the Expression be understood rightly) for commanding sake. In such Cases, His Will is a sufficient Reason for our Obedience; and the Exercise of our Obedience is a sufficient Reason for his Will.

I do not therefore maintain, that even in such Cases as these, God determines without a Reason. I conceive every thing of this kind is entirely impossible to an intelligent Being. We ourselves, imperfect as we are, have some Reasons, right or wrong, for every deliberate Action; and no Question can be made but the supreme Intelligence is constantly determin'd by some Reasons, and those the best which the Nature of the Thing will bear.

What I mean here will be best explain'd by observing, that there may be a general Reason to determine things indifferent, where there is none assignable for the particular Determination, or the Preference of one indifferent Thing before another. Thus, in the Instance before produced, a Reason there was, why the Supreme Being should create the World; and consequently, a general Reason there must be for producing it in some

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some determin'd Time: But yet, as it was in itself perfectly indifferent, whether it were created sooner or later, so there can be no Reason assign'd for the particular Determination of Time, or why that one Season was chosen in preference to another.

Thus again, on Supposition, that a certain Action is fit and proper, there may be several Means equally serviceable for the Performance of that Action; and several Circumstances equally suited to it. In such a Case as this, there may be a general Reason for settling either the Means or Circumstances; the Decency of Life, or Uniformity of Behaviour may sometimes require it. But yet, as these several Means and Circumstances are suppos'd to be equally suited to the Action, in that View there can be no particular Reason of Preference; and therefore the Being, who determines them, must so far act by mere Will and Pleasure.

Again; Where there are no Reasons, either moral or natural, in the Sense before explain'd, for the particular Determination made, there may still be a fit and proper Occasion; and this, in such Circumstances, will become a Reason. I shall explain what I mean by the following Instance. The Sacrament of The Lord's Supper consists in Eating Bread, and Drinking Wine, in Remembrance of *Christ*, i. e. This outward Action is prescrib'd to us as an Expression of

our Gratitude towards him. Now Gratitude is a moral Duty; and the Duty of receiving the Holy Sacrament, consider'd as an Act of Gratitude, is of a moral Kind. But then, whether the Eating Bread and Drinking Wine, or the Performance of any other outward Ceremony should be appointed to express our Gratitude; — This, I say, is both in a moral and natural Account, indifferent; and the Institution, in this respect, is positive. Notwithstanding this, I must affirm, that there was a proper Occasion for this particular Institution. It is well known, that to eat Bread, and to drink Wine, in an Eucharistical Way, had obtain'd among the *Jews*, and was in Use in our Saviour's Time. He consecrates therefore this Ceremony; and takes Occasion from the Practice of the *Jewish* Church, to fix and settle an Institution of his own.

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my Note*

Once more; Tho' we should suppose no Reasons either natural or moral; and no such particular Occasion as was mention'd before, for giving the Command, yet still I must assert, that such a Command may possibly proceed from God: For, if every other Reason were wanting, yet the mere Trial and Exercise of our Obedience is of itself sufficient. Whether any Precepts of this Kind have ever been in fact prescrib'd, is another Question, and which we are no ways concern'd to answer. However, I

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must maintain, that such Precepts may be given us; and that no Conclusions can be drawn to the contrary, either from the Reason of the Thing, or the Perfections of the Divine Nature.

I must now produce such Arguments as are proper to confirm the point before stated: And my

First Proof shall be drawn from the Relation which God bears to us as Creator, and that absolute Authority he must necessarily have over us on that Account. Now, an Authority of this kind must imply in it a Right to command every Thing which is the Object of Command; every Thing in itself possible to be done, and capable of being requir'd; in short, every Thing consistent with the Reason of Things and the Attributes of the Divine Nature.

*is not inconsistent*

What Objections then can be alledg'd against God's Right of determining Things indifferent? Are Precepts of this Kind incapable of being obey'd? By no means: Are such Things incapable of being requir'd? No: For, if without a Command every Man hath a Right to determine for himself, nothing can be plainer than this, that God may, if he pleases, determine for him: And there is nothing which Man may rightly perform, but God may as justly require it.

*a good reason*

Things in themselves ill and wrong, are not the Objects of Command; and therefore cannot be properly requir'd by any Authority whatsoever. Things in themselves fit and right, are, I will not say barely the *Proper*, but the *Necessary* Matter of just and wise Command: And it is on this Principle I maintain, that the Rules of Virtue must be the Commands of God. But then there are other Matters, which are not the necessary, but only the possible Objects of Authority; Things, which may be either requir'd or forbidden, or left undetermin'd as the Supreme Legislator pleases; and it is in reference to these chiefly that an absolute Authority is shewn.

At the same  
good reason  
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just consequences.

In a Word; if Things indifferent are capable of being determin'd by any Power, then a Right to determine them must be implied in absolute Authority; and if absolute Authority may not determine them, then neither ought they to be determin'd by private Will; from whence these notable Consequences may be deduc'd, that there is, strictly speaking, nothing as to its Use indifferent, nor hath any Man the least Liberty of Choice at all.

I would argue, in the next place, from the Relation which we bear to God as Creatures, and that full and entire Subjection to him which this Relation must necessarily lay us under. As therefore we are bound from  
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hence to obey every Precept which God gives us, so on the other hand God may give us any Precepts which are fitted to try this Obedience. But will a serious Person assert, that Things indifferent cannot become Matter of such a Trial? May we not perform those Things in virtue of a Command, which we might justly have perform'd without a Command? And if we do so, Do we not by this express our Obedience? Nay, Do we not express it in the most ample manner by performing those Things, for which we have no Reason but purely the Command itself? If this be true, then I may venture to assert, that positive Precepts are not only capable of being given us, but the most proper Exercise of our absolute Subjection to the Supreme Being.

Obedience may indeed be shewn in other Cases too. We may, and I hope all of us do regard the Will of God in performing those Things which are in themselves fitting. In these Cases we are acted by two distinct Principles; the appearing Fitness of the Thing, and a Sense of the Divine Pleasure. But it is the later Principle only which makes our Actions Instances of Obedience. Any farther than we consider moral Virtues as the Will of God, and practise them upon that account, we do not properly obey God at all; we may indeed be term'd moral Men, but not in the least religious.

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Now, if Religion itself consists in obeying God, or the acting in virtue of a Divine Command, then I conceive it is plain, that those Things may become Instances of Duty and Matter of Religion, for which no Reason can be assign'd but the Command. Our Author indeed denies this, and asserts, that we are oblig'd to act no farther than the Thing requir'd had an antecedent Fitness, and was proper to have been done without any Injunction. Nay, as tho' he had not carried the Matter high enough, he maintains over and above, that nothing can be Matter of Duty, the Reason and Fitness of which is not laid open to us. This is bold indeed! and I conceive at one Stroke directly overthrows all Obligations of Obedience to God. For, if we are concern'd to perform every thing, the moral Fitness of which appears, even without the Intervention of a Precept; and if the Divine Authority itself cannot oblige us but by assigning the moral Reasons of the Precept; then all Engagements on our Part must arise, not from the Consideration of the Divine Will, but of our own Reason. On this Foot all Authority on God's Part, and all Obedience on ours, must be perfectly destroy'd.

*is true*

To this I will desire Liberty to add another Argument drawn from the manifest and inexcusable Absurdities of the contrary Opinion. If God cannot give us positive Precepts,

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cepts, nor require any thing to be done by us which was not equally necessary before the Command, then I conceive this Consequence arises; neither hath any other Being a Right to prescribe in Matters of this Nature; for, there can be no Right or Power in the Creature, which doth not sublist more eminently in the Creator. Let us see how, on this Foot, Society and Government can be supported.

In the first place, Nothing can be requir'd by the Civil Power, which was not, upon its own account, incumbent on us antecedently to the Prescription: And where different Measures may equally conduce to the same End, there they must be left entirely undetermin'd; because, in such Cases, there can be no particular Reason for Choice or Preference. From whence it will follow, that one of the great Designs of Civil Power is entirely voided, *viz.* An uniting the whole Force of the Community, and a joint prosecuting the same End by the same Means.

In the next place; Before any Civil Injunctions can take place, the particular Reason and Fitness of the Injunction must likewise be given. This hath been asserted with regard to God; and therefore must equally hold with regard to the Civil Magistrate. Now, if no Command can be effectual unless the Reasons of it be distinctly set forth, it is equally necessary, that the  
Strength

Strength and Force of these Reasons should be distinctly perceiv'd: For, to that Person, by whom they are not perceiv'd, they are not Reasons. From hence it follows, that no Subject is bound to act in any Instance farther than he himself thinks fit, and is inclin'd to do so. For, on this Hypothesis, he can be under no Obligation but what arises from the Reasons perceiv'd by him; of which he only is the proper Judge; and therefore, he only can determine whether the Command shall be observ'd or no. If this be the Condition of Things, and Liberty is to be understood in such a Latitude, then are we reduc'd to a State of Nature indeed: Every Man hath a Right to act in all respects as in his own great Wisdom he shall judge fit: No one hath any Pretence to censure or punish him: Every one who offers to controul him, doth so far usurp on his native Privilege: He is plainly Lord of himself, and entirely independent on any Authority whatsoever. These are Positions no more consistent with general Interest than common Sense.

Let us see now what Objections are alledg'd by our Author against the Possibility of positive Precepts in Matters of Religion. And,

1. He objects, that if God be unchangeable, our Duty to him must be so too; from the Beginning of the World to the End of it  
always

always the same; incapable of being chang'd either in whole or in part: And consequently, that no Person, if he comes from God, can teach us any other Religion, or give us any Precepts but what are founded on the Relations in which we stand to God and Man [p. 20.]

We allow and contend that God is unchangeable in his Nature and his Will; and the general Duties which we owe to him are likewise unchangeable. Love, Thankfulness, Trust and Obedience ever were, and ever will be Duties; to which may be added all the several Methods of Conduct, which result from the Relations in which we stand either to God or our fellow Creatures. But the Question before us, is, Whether God may not superadd to these some Points of a positive Nature; whether, since Obedience in the general is a Duty founded on the moral Reasons of Things, God may not assign some particular Instances for the Exercise of this Obedience; and especially, if the Things insisted on be, in some respects, naturally convenient, and adapted to the Service and Improvement of Vertue?

Our Author maintains the contrary; and alledges, "that to suppose any things [enjoin'd by Revelation] which are not of a moral Kind, and did not oblige perpetually, must suppose a Change in the Mind of God." [p. 131.] If there be any



any Force in this Kind of arguing, it must be resolv'd into the following Principle, viz. God cannot will that any thing should be done in Time, which he did not will should be done from Eternity. If this be admitted, then must we deny, that the World was ever created by him; and that he can, consistently with his Attributes, exert any Acts whatsoever *ad extra*; for such Acts must be exerted in Time; and consequently, must suppose some prior and antecedent Duration. But, according to this Gentleman, such a Change in reference to the Acts of God, must infer a like Change of Will; and therefore must entirely destroy his Immutability.

The real truth of the Case is this; God neither does, nor wills any thing in Time, which he did not will from Eternity: But then, what he will'd from Eternity may receive its Effect and Accomplishment in Time; And the particular Season in which it is accomplish'd, is that very Season which God determin'd from all Eternity. The *Jewish* Institution was what God will'd from all Ages: But then he decreed, that this Institution should take place in some determin'd Time; should last for a certain Period; should at length give way to another Institution more perfect, and better accommodated to the then State and Condition of Things. In this way of thinking, however the

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the particular Instances of Obedience be varied, the Divine Will is one and unvaried.

I have taken occasion to observe before, that God never does or enjoins any thing without some sufficient Reasons; as these Reasons therefore vary, his Acts must vary likewise: His Will however is unchang'd, as being always suited to that which is proper and reasonable. In this I am supported by a notable Concession of our Author himself, *viz.* "To alter one's Conduct as Circumstances alter, is not only an Act of the greatest Prudence and Judgment, but is consistent with the greatest Steadiness."

p. 105. If this be true, then to give us positive Institutions on proper Occasions; or, to alter these Institutions as Circumstances alter, is entirely defensible; is an Act of Reason and Prudence; is consistent with the greatest Steadiness; or, with that very Immutability from which the present Objection is drawn.

That Precepts of this kind therefore may be alter'd, doth not arise from any Change in the Will of God, but from the Circumstances of Things themselves. They were originally impos'd, whenever they have been impos'd, not absolutely without any Reason; this State of the Case we reject entirely; there are, and always must be some Reasons for them, tho' they may not appear to us. But as these very Reasons are themselves mutable,

mutable, so these Precepts must be so too: And the Change of such Institutions, as the Reasons of them alter, is, in truth, an Argument of the Stability of God's Will, which unalterably resolves upon those things which are best and fittest upon the whole.

A second Objection, drawn from God's Wisdom, is thus set forth; "Whatsoever  
" is in itself indifferent, either as to Matter  
" or Manner, must be so to an all-wise Being,  
" who judges of Things as they are: And  
" for the same Reason that he commands  
" Things that are Good, and forbids those  
" which are Evil, he leaves Men at Liberty  
" in all Things indifferent " [p. 122.] —  
" To suppose [the contrary] would be to  
" make God act unreasonably; since all  
" those Reasons which oblig'd him to com-  
" mand Good, and to forbid Evil Things,  
" must wholly cease in relation to a Sub-  
" ject, which by being indifferent partakes  
" of neither. " [p. 134, 135.]

If there be any Force in the Argument here alledg'd, it will carry us a great deal farther than this Writer himself intends: It will conclude not only against God's determining in Things indifferent, but likewise against all Determinations of this Kind, tho' they should arise from private Will and Pleasure; and consequently, whilst our Author would seem to enlarge Men's Liberty, he doth most effectually subvert it. For,  
if

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if it be inconsistent with Wisdom in God to command or forbid Things in themselves indifferent, (because it is suppos'd there can be no End or Reason for such Determination) it must be equally inconsistent with Wisdom in Men to make any Choice in Cases of this Nature; and so far forth as they presume to act either way, they must deviate from what is fit and proper, as chusing without any sufficient Grounds or Reasons of Choice. According to this way of arguing, Things by being indifferent in themselves, are not indifferent as to their Use; and to leave Men to their Liberty is to destroy it.

I do readily allow, that to an all-wise Being every Thing appears as it really is; Things essentially Good, as such; Things essentially Evil, as Evil; and Things in themselves indifferent, as indifferent: But then I do deny the Consequence which our Author would deduce from thence, viz. that God cannot, consistently with his Wisdom, give us any Precepts in reference to Things indifferent. I must maintain the direct opposite Conclusion; and assert, That if an all-wise Being judges of Things indifferent as such, he must judge of them as the possible Objects of Command; for the very Nature of Indifferency consists in this, that Things of that Kind may equally be determin'd to either Side.

Nor



Nor will it at all follow, that if Points of this Kind should be settled by a Divine Command, God would in such Cases act unreasonably. I do admit, that all those Reasons which oblig'd him to command those Things which are in themselves Good, and to forbid those Things which are in themselves Evil, must wholly cease in relation to a Subject, which by being indifferent partakes of neither. These Reasons, I grant, must cease: But what then? Does it follow, that because Precepts of this Kind are not founded on moral and necessary Reasons, therefore they can be built on none at all? If Precepts of this Kind may prove subversive to the Interests of Virtue; if they may conduce to some temporal Convenience; if they may promote the Order and Decency of civil or religious Life; if, lastly, they may be a proper Exercise of our entire Obedience to the Divine Will, then there may be Reasons for giving them: And if such Reasons there really are, then to determine Points in a moral View indifferent, is not to act unreasonably.

Of this our Author was aware; and therefore subjoins, "If there were any Reason to deprive Men of their Liberty in Things indifferent, they would then cease to be indifferent." The Fallacy of the Argument lies in the Use of the Word *Indifferent*, which must be oppos'd, not to prudential,

dential, but to moral and absolutely necessary Reasons. It is in this Sense our Author, on most Occasions, uses it; and the Question I have all along been debating is thus stated by himself, *viz.* "Whether God, who for  
 " many Ages did not command or forbid  
 " any Thing, but what was moral or im-  
 " moral, hath in some Cases issu'd out Com-  
 " mands, which have no Foundation in  
 " Reason." Commands which have no  
 Foundation in Reason, must plainly signify  
 Commands not founded in moral Reasons:  
 And, on several other Occasions, he stren-  
 uously maintains, that nothing can become  
 Matter of Religion, which is not in itself,  
 and eternally obliging. If this be the Case,  
 then Things may still remain in themselves  
 indifferent, notwithstanding the foregoing  
 Reasons for determining their Use; and to  
 settle them, may, in a prudential View, be  
 proper, tho' it were not absolutely and eter-  
 nally necessary.

A Third Objection is drawn from God's  
 Goodness, the whole Amount of which is  
 this; to give us positive Precepts, or to  
 determine Things in themselves indifferent,  
 must so far impair that Liberty, in which  
 our Happiness itself consists: [V. p. 135.]  
 It hazards, without any Necessity, our eter-  
 nal Concerns, and must place Men in a  
 much worse Condition, than if they had  
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been only subject to the Law of Nature.  
[V. p. 125.]

It is asserted, in the first place, that God cannot prescribe to us in Matters indifferent, because this is inconsistent with human Happiness; and it is asserted farther, that human Happiness must depend on our Liberty in all such Things. Yet, notwithstanding this, our Author is so little sensible of the Difficulties which arise from hence, that, in another place, he represents the extream Easiness of obeying such Precepts; and tells us, "There is nothing of this Kind which some Men will not punctually observe, in hopes to atone for their darling Vices." [p. 142, 177.] Thus far indeed he asserts truly, and may be justified by Fact and Experience. But doth not this suppose, that there may be less Trouble in obeying Precepts of a positive, than of a moral Kind? and consequently, that mere Obedience is no more inconsistent with present Happiness in the one Case, than in the other?

In truth, to give us positive Commands on proper Occasions, is so far from destroying, that it really tends to improve our Happiness. If the Commands are any way instrumental to moral Virtue; or serve to promote some temporal Advantage; or to guard against some temporal Disadvantage, the Point before us is clear: Things are then

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then determin'd for our Good ; and the Use of our Liberty is restrain'd in those Cases, in which we might otherwise turn it against ourselves.

To this we may add, that if there be in human Nature a strong Appetite of Freedom, (as indeed there is) yet still no moral Pleasures can arise from the Exercise of such a Freedom. The Satisfaction of having made a Choice on trifling Considerations is itself trifling : But to consider, that whilst we act, we pay an Obedience to an all-good and an all-wise Being, this cannot but minister to us a Pleasure indeed : And we shall reap a Satisfaction from the Consciousness of obeying God vastly superior to any Thing we can gain by gratifying ourselves.

To go on ; It is alledg'd, in the next place, that to give us positive Commands, is to hazard, without any Necessity, our Eternal Concerns. And as God cannot punish us for neglecting those Things which have no Worth or Value in themselves, so it is equally impossible he should give us any Precepts in relation to them. [V. p. 122.]

But I would desire to know, whether Obedience to the Will of God be not a moral and necessary Duty : If it be so, then Disobedience must be essentially wrong and punishable ; and Men incur the Divine Displeasure, not by neglecting a Thing indifferent, but disobeying a Divine Command.

The Case therefore is not fairly stated in the Objection. The doing or forbearing Things indifferent, are not the Terms of Salvation: It is plac'd on quite another Foot, *viz.* An Obedience to the Will of God: This surely is by no means unnecessary; because it is in its own Nature and eternally unfit, that those should enjoy the Divine Favour, who are regardless of the Divine Pleasure.

How far God's Will reaches in this regard, is, or may be known by us certainly; for nothing can be to us a Matter of Duty, which is plac'd beyond our Knowledge. But then, if we wilfully neglect to inform ourselves; or being inform'd, perversly dispute the Point, we act disagreeably to that Relation in which we stand to God; and the Miseries which we incur thereby, do not arise from the Will of a capricious or unkind Being, but the unalterable Determinations of infinite Wisdom and Goodness.

There remains but one Thing farther to be consider'd under this Head, *viz.* That to give Men positive Precepts must place them in a worse Condition, than if they were only subject to the Law of Nature. Those who have no other Law, can be judg'd by that alone; and therefore cannot hazard the Favour of God by a Disregard to Things indifferent.

The Objection is built on this Principle, *viz.* that our Condition must be necessarily either

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# REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 181

either worse or better, in proportion as our Obligations are of a greater or less Extent; those being suppos'd the happiest who have least to do, and fewest Duties to discharge. If this extravagant Principle be admitted, then must we assert, that the wisest and greatest Men are more unhappy than the meanest and most illiterate; because their Circumstances and Views of Things will proportionably increase their Duties; and several Points will be to them obligatory, from which the Condition of other Persons might excuse them. From hence it follows, that as Improvement in Wisdom and Knowledge is a Misfortune; and Men's Happiness consists, not in knowing, but being ignorant, so those Beings which know the least, (and therefore are most free from religious Obligations) are most happy. Let our Adversaries pursue this Conclusion, and prefer, if they please, the Condition of Brutes before that of Men: These Creatures, as they are incapable of any Obligations, so can they run no Hazards.

In truth, our Happiness is not impair'd, but increas'd by the Extent of our religious Knowledge. If our Obligations are from hence enlarg'd, the Advantages which will arise from answering these Obligations must be proportionable: And the Rewards of Obedience will always ballance the Punishments of Disobedience.



I have noted already, that absolute Submission to the Divine Will is a necessary Duty. The Trial and Exercise therefore of this Submission cannot place us in a worse State than the Exercise of any other Duty. It serves to improve and better us, and to render us more fit Objects of Favour.

Still the Argument will be stronger, if the Matters in which our Obedience is try'd shall likewise help forward the common Interests of Virtue; if they are Fences against Temptations; apt to suggest to us proper Sentiments; or, in any other respect, conduce to the Improvement of a virtuous Temper. If this be the Case, then Precepts of this Kind serve not to hazard, but to secure and facilitate our Salvation; and to neglect them, when given, is to desert the Interests of that Virtue, they are intended to support.

I am carried on by this Remark to consider a fourth Objection alledg'd by our Author, *viz.* That positive Precepts are prejudicial to the real Interests of Virtue; and lead the way to the grossest and most senseless Superstition. The Objection is thus stated p. 141. "It is certain that the Mind  
"may be overloaded as well as the Body:  
"And the more it is taken up with the  
"Observation of Things which are not of a  
"moral Nature, the less will it be able to  
"attend to those that are; which requiring  
"the Application of the whole Man, can  
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" never be rightly perform'd, while the  
 " Mind, by laying stress on other Things,  
 " is diverted from attending on them; espe-  
 " cially if it be consider'd, that Superstition,  
 " if once suffer'd to mix with Religion, will  
 " always be gaining Ground. If Reason is  
 " to be heard; no unnecessary Things  
 " will be admitted; but, if it be not,  
 " where shall we stop? If People are once  
 " brought to believe that such Things are  
 " good for any Thing, they will be apt  
 " to believe that they are good for all  
 " Things."

Two Things are here asserted; 1. That  
 positive Precepts must overload the Mind,  
 and draw it off from attending to Things of a  
 moral Nature. 2. That they introduce  
 Superstition; because, if Men are brought  
 to believe that these Things [*i. e.* positive  
 Institutions] are good for any Thing, they  
 will be apt to believe they are good for all  
 Things.

With reference to the former Part of the  
 Objection, it must indeed be own'd, that  
 real Virtue and Religion, may, in certain  
 Cases, be prejudic'd by ritual and ceremo-  
 nious Performances. This ill Consequence  
 must arise, when they are either too nume-  
 rous; or else, when they are not properly  
 expressive of that Religion they are pre-  
 tended to support; or, lastly, when they  
 are not suited to the State and Condition of



those Persons on whom they are impos'd. But, if positive Institutions may, in some Cases, be prejudicial, doth it follow, they must therefore be so in all? Are Fire and Water absolutely useless and mischievous, because in certain Circumstances the worst Consequences have arisen from them? In like manner, positive Institutions may be of real Service in some Cases, whatever Inconveniences may possibly arise in others; for the Prejudice they may occasion, doth by no means arise from hence, that they are positive, but from another quite different Consideration.

Let us admit, that the Mind may be overloaded; and that too much Shew and and Outside may divert us from attending to Matters of more Importance. What then! Is nothing of this Kind to be allow'd of; and must we reject the Use, because Inconveniences will arise from the Abuse of it? Our Author indeed asserts, "That Things  
" of a moral Nature require the Application  
" of the whole Man, and therefore can  
" never be rightly perform'd whilst the  
" Mind, by laying Stress on other Things,  
" is diverted from attending to them." To which we reply, That altho' the Matter of positive Institutions be not, as to its Nature, moral, yet Obedience to them, when commanded by God, is so; and the Stress which is, or ought to be laid on them, does not  
regard



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regard their mere Matter, (which is confess'd to be in itself indifferent) but the Will and Authority of the Imposer; from whence it follows, that the Mind is so far from being diverted, by Institutions of this Kind, from attending to moral Duty, that the right Observation of them implies and requires a strict Attention to it. To which may be added farther, that positive Institutions themselves may have a direct View to Morality or Religion; They may be of singular Use and Service this Way; and consequently, they are so far from being essentially injurious, that something of this Kind may be highly necessary to support it.

To make this more evident, I shall observe, that no Religion hath ever yet subsisted in Fact without some Institutions. Mere Natural Religion, without any thing instituted of any Kind, is nothing but Idea, and hath no Existence but in the Mind. Where God hath not been pleas'd to make Appointments of this Nature, Men have done it for themselves; and hence 'tis that such Institutions have been liable to the same Imperfections to which Men themselves are subject. Yet, however frequently they have err'd in their particular Determinations, their Judgment concerning the general Point is unquestionable; and the Argument to be drawn from hence hath all that Force, which  
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general, — I may say, universal Consent can give it.

Let it be observ'd, in the next place, that one great Point of Religion, is, The Worship of the Supreme Being. Now, admitting that the Excellency of religious Worship will depend on the inward Sense of the Worshipper, yet still, this Worship itself cannot be perform'd without something external. It requires Rites and Ceremonies of some Kind or other. It implies not only an inward Sense of the Divine Perfections, and of our Engagements to the Supreme Being, but likewise such an outward Expression of it, that the rest of Mankind may be Witnesses of our Piety. But can this be done without any Rites at all? Are Men intimately conscious to each other's Thoughts; or, are they capable of knowing them, otherwise than they are reveal'd by something external? As well might we reason and discourse with each other, without the Use of Signs, as express our Piety, in the present Case, without something external.

It may be noted farther, that as external Rites are necessary, as being Expressions of our inward Piety, so are they likewise useful to strengthen and cherish this Piety itself. I do by no means affirm, that Rites of every Kind are serviceable in this Case. A wrong Choice may indeed be made. But what I maintain, is this; Rites, when fitly chosen, may

may become the Signs of something internal; and when they are so, the right Use of them will suggest those Sentiments of which they are the Signs. Thus it happens in other Cases likewise: Words, whether spoken or written, have no necessary Connection with Ideas, nor are they naturally significant: But yet, when the Sense of them is once determin'd by Use, they suggest to us the Ideas they are design'd to represent, and become useful even in the Exercise of our own inward Reasoning.

I hope it may appear from this kind of arguing, that positive Institutions are not Incumbrances on real Virtue and Religion; that they do not necessarily divert the Mind from that which is in its own Nature excellent; but may, when discreetly chosen, become serviceable to the best Purposes. Still it will be insisted, that whatever Use may possibly be made of them, yet this is balanc'd by Consequences of another Kind. It hath been affirm'd, that they lead the Way to Superstition; "For if Men are once brought to believe that these Things are good for any Thing, they will be apt to believe that they are good for all Things."

In reply to this, I must acknowledge, that it is difficult to account for all the Follies of Mankind. There are no Principles, however certain or important, from which weak Men



Men may not pretend to draw bad Conclusions ; nor are there any Matters, however useful, which may not be applied to evil Purposes by the perverse. The Question therefore, in the present Case, ought to be, *Not*, Whether weak Persons may not sometimes make a bad Use of positive Institutions ; but, Whether such Institutions do of themselves lead to it : — *Not*, Whether Men may not, by perverting these Institutions, become superstitious ; but, Whether the right Use of them doth, in its own Nature, tend to Superstition.

Our Author, who objects against positive Institutions on this Foot, in another Place tells us, that Religion itself hath been made the Cause of Mischief, and render'd destructive of the common Welfare. To this purpose he observes [p. 165.] “ Tho’ we cry  
“ up the great Advantage we have above  
“ other Animals in being capable of Religion, yet those Animals we despise for  
“ the Want of it, herd most socially together, &c.” — And afterwards, “ Men,  
“ tho’ they cannot subsist but in Society,  
“ and have Hands, Speech, and Reason to  
“ qualify them for the Blessing of it above  
“ all other Animals ; nay, what is more,  
“ have Religion, design’d to unite them in  
“ the firm Bonds of Love and Friendship,  
“ and to engage them to vie with one another in all good Offices ; and the good-  
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REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 189

“ natur'd Laity too have, at a vast Expence,  
“ hir'd Persons to inculcate these generous  
“ Notions; yet, alas! in spite of all these  
“ Helps and Motives, Religion has been  
“ made, by these very Persons, a Pretence  
“ to render Men unsociable, fierce, and  
“ cruel, and to act every thing destructive  
“ to the common Welfare. ” What then;  
must all Religion therefore be discarded?  
One might be tempted to suspect that these  
are our Author's Sentiments; for he introduces  
his Reflections in this Place by intimating, that  
Animals which want Religion are in better  
Circumstances than those which have it. But,  
whatever this Gentleman may think of the  
Matter, it will be difficult to persuade Man-  
kind to part with their Religion on this  
Score. They will be apt to imagine that  
these Mischiefs arise rather from the Want  
of inward Religion, than the having it;  
and consequently, that this is a stronger Ar-  
gument for cultivating Religion, than dis-  
carding it.

Yet be this as it will; as to the Case of  
positive Institutions I must observe, that they  
do not of themselves lead to Superstition.  
This consists in laying greater Stress on  
Matters which respect Religion, or are sup-  
pos'd to do so, than they can bear: Whilst  
therefore Men consider Things as they really  
are, no Superstition can arise. To observe  
positive Institutions as such, is to act agree-  
ably



ably to the Nature of Things; it gives them their just and proper Weight; and consequently, is neither superstitious in itself, nor hath it the least Tendency that Way: And to observe them as appointed by God, when they have in fact been so appointed, is to consider Things as they really are; it ascribes to them just so much as Things so consider'd, demand; and therefore must be highly fitting and reasonable.

With reference to this Point, Men betray their Superstition principally in these Three Cases, *viz.* Either by considering Things which are merely Positive, as excellent in themselves, and in their own Nature Moral; Or else, by considering Institutions merely Human, as Divine; Or, lastly, by laying too great Weight on any Institutions, whether Human or Divine. And it must be confess'd that Men have, at different Times, err'd in each of these respects. However, is this a Reason why God should give us no positive Institutions at all?

Our Author, I have observ'd, chuses the Affirmative, and builds on this Principle, "that if Men are brought to believe that positive Institutions are good for any Thing, they will be apt to believe they are good for all Things." They will be apt to believe this: — But from whence doth this Aptness, this Tendency to Superstition arise? — From the Nature of positive



tive Institutions? By no means; for positive Institutions, as such, do not lead us to think them Moral; Human Institutions, as Human, do not lead us to think them Divine; and, admitting that positive Institutions are good for something, it doth by no means follow, nor doth it seem to follow, that they must be good for all Things.

The Case is plain enough from our Author's own State of it. "If, says he, Men are brought to believe that positive Institutions are good for any Thing, *They will be apt* to believe, that they are good for all Things." This Error arises purely from themselves, and the sad Corruptions they give way to. They are willing to compound Matters at the easiest Rate; and because the outward Ceremonies of Religion are more easily gone thro', than inward and sincere Piety, they endeavour to make these Performances serve instead of it. A fatal Error this, no doubt, and such as takes off from all the Worth and Value of these Performances themselves. But if, in order to avoid this Consequence, all positive Institutions were discarded, would this at all mend the Matter? Would there be less Impiety, or less Superstition than there is at present? I believe not: By giving up these Out-guards of Religion, we cannot long preserve the inward Sense of it; for Natural Religion never yet subsisted without something of Instituted,

stituted. And as to Superstition, pray how is this entirely remov'd by discarding Institutions? May we not shew as much Superstition by an unreasonable Avoiding, as by a groundless and fond Practice of certain Things? Is not This, to lay greater Stress on an Omission, than the Nature of the Thing will bear; and consequently, Is not this a real Instance of Superstition?

One thing more I must note on this Occasion, viz. that Men may as really discover Superstition in the Practice of Moral Duties, as the Performance of Instituted. For, if Superstition implies the laying greater Stress on any Matters relating to Religion, than they can reasonably bear, then in all those Cases where Men over-rate any moral Performances, and make one Duty supply the room of others, they are really superstitious. But is this an imaginary or groundless Supposition? Have we not daily Instances of Persons, who hope to atone for their Miscarriages in one Kind by an extraordinary Rigour in others? Is not Benevolence, and Good-nature itself sometimes made the Whole of Religion; — To cover every other Defect, and to supply the Want of every other Virtue? Pray what is this, but a Superstition in Morals? What then; Must Morality therefore be discarded, and to avoid Superstition, must we run ourselves into Profaneness? No certainly; This is an Error in the worst Extream,

## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 193

Extream, and will be follow'd by Consequences Ten thousand times more dangerous than the worst Kind of Superstition can lead Men into.

I must grant indeed, that Superstition is bad, and we are concern'd to guard against it as well as we can. But How, after all, must we do this? — By reducing every Thing to Natural Religion? This, alas! is an impracticable Scheme; and, if practicable, yet would not reach the Purpose, unless we could make Men in every respect Wise; which, if we were able to do, no Difficulties would ever arise from Matters Instituted.

In short, there is but one way of doing this to any Purpose: Let us endeavour heartily to discover the Will of God, Whether by the Light of Human Reason, or from Divine Revelation. Whatever shall appear to be the Divine Will from either Consideration, we must adhere to it inviolably; Whatever cannot be prov'd on this Foot, is no Part of Religion. This is the general Rule, to which we must add Nothing, and from which we must diminish Nothing. To do the one is Superstition, to do the other is Impiety.

O CHAP





## C H A P. IV.

*Whether Natural and Reveal'd Religion be necessarily one and the same; and if not, Wherein the proper Distinction between them doth consist.*



H I S Question naturally arises from the two last, and will receive a Determination from considering what may reasonably be offered on those former Heads. If the Law, or Religion of Nature be absolutely perfect; and if it be immutable in such a Sense as to be incapable either of Addition or Diminution, we must, I think, conclude (as our Author does) "That Natural and Reveal'd Religion are one and the same; that they differ only as to the Manner of their being communicated; [p. 3.] and that Christianity, tho' the Name be of a later Date, must be as old and extensive as human Nature." [p. 4.] But, on the other Hand, If the Law or Religion



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ligion of Nature be not absolutely perfect; nor immutable in that Sense in which our Author contends it is, then we shall be obliged to take the other Side of the Question, and to maintain that they differ from each other, as well with regard to the Subject Matter of each, as the Way and Manner of their being made known to us.

But however, tho' our Author be thus far regular in his Deduction, whilst he infers the entire Unity of Natural and Reveal'd Religion, from the absolute Perfection and Immutability of the former, yet I cannot see why, upon the Whole of his Scheme, he should be led to take any Notice of this Conclusion at all. It is the great Design of his Book to prove, That there neither hath been, nor can be any Revelation. If this be so, then what Occasion is there for insisting, that Natural and Reveal'd Religion must be the same? What Occasion for supposing a Point, which, upon his Principles, he must not suppose; and which it is his great Purpose to overthrow? It must seem odd to every By-stander, that this Gentleman should concern himself with proving such extraordinary Points as these, "That Natural and Reveal'd Religion are one and the same;" and, "That Christianity is as old as the Creation," whilst his real Sentiments most apparently are, That there is no such Thing as Reveal'd Religi-

on, and that Christianity in particular is a gross Imposture. For, the Gentleman who here maintains that Natural and Reveal'd Religion are one as to Matter, in other Places contends as heartily, that there is but one Way, one Method of discovering Religion; *viz.* by the Use of our natural Faculties, p. 5. If this be true, then we can learn Nothing from Revelation at all; and if Nothing can be learn'd from it, then it is to all Intents and Purposes no Revelation.

The Truth is, The Gentleman did not care to speak out at once. He hath endeavour'd therefore to draw his Readers on gradually. At first he played fast and loose with the Notion of the Law of Nature; which Point being, as he thought, sufficiently obscur'd, he proceeded to shew, that this Law must be absolutely perfect; if so, it must be immutable, incapable of Addition or Diminution; and consequently, Nothing can be requir'd in Time which did not equally oblige always. From hence he infers, that there can be no Manner of Difference between Natural and Reveal'd Religion: He tells us, That both having the same End, their Precepts must be the same; and "That they must prescribe the same Means, since those Means which at one Time promote human Happiness, equally promote it at all Times." p. 104. Beyond this he attempts to prove farther, That every man knows,

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or may easily know all that this absolutely perfect Law of Nature contains under it ; — That a Revelation therefore is entirely needless ; — That this Revelation cannot make any Thing more clear than it was before ; — That, as on the one Hand, there is none Occasion for a Revelation, so there can be no sufficient Proof that such a Revelation hath ever been made at all ; That the Pretences to it have given Birth to many monstrous Opinions and Practices, to which a wise and good Being could never possibly afford Occasion : In short, That Superstition and Immorality cannot be avoided on any other Foot, than by adhering entirely to Natural Religion, and discarding all Pretences whatsoever to Revelation.

Had this Scheme been open'd all at once, and set forth in express Words at first, it would have shock'd almost every Reader, and have prevented those Impressions, which it was our Author's Design to make. This oblig'd him to speak sometimes with Reserve ; sometimes to make Suppositions contrary to the very Scheme he would inculcate ; and sometimes even to acknowledge the Reality of that Revelation he would disprove. There is none other way than this, of accounting for his Conduct on certain Occasions ; for I cannot by any Means think, that he erred in this respect casually, or did not see that he had really acknowledged



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or supposed what, on his Principles as explain'd in other Places, he was oblig'd neither to acknowledge nor suppose.

The latter Part of the foregoing Scheme shall be examined hereafter in its proper place ; at present, I am concerned to search, Whether Natural and Reveal'd Religion, if a Revelation there be, must be necessarily one and the same.

The Negative, I conceive, will appear from hence ; That God may, if he pleases, issue out Commands, which are not built on the moral Reasons of Things ; that he may give us positive Precepts, which Precepts cannot be given us otherwise than by Revelation : For Natural Religion, as our Author himself contends, includes nothing of a positive Nature. If therefore Precepts of this kind may be given us ; and such cannot be given by God, unless reveal'd ; then the Matter of Revelation may be in some respects different from the Matter of Natural Religion. If the one may contain Points not contained under the other, it is evident beyond Dispute, that the one may so far differ from the other ; or, to vary the Expression a little, That Natural and Reveal'd Religion are not necessarily one and the same. Thus far I think it clear they may be different : Whether they really are so or not, is another Question, and to be determined by other Arguments.

REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 199

To which Purpose I shall observe,

1. That it might on several Accounts be expected, if God should ever vouchsafe us a Revelation of his Will, it would contain in it some Matters of a positive Nature; and consequently, such as are not Matters of Natural Religion. And,

2. That every Revelation, whether real or pretended, which hath ever been offered us, hath actually and in fact contained such Points.

As to the former, I must observe, That if God should ever vouchsafe us any Revelation of his Will, it might reasonably be presum'd his first Care would be to impress on Men's Minds a deep Sense of this fundamental Point, *viz.* of his own supreme Dominion and Authority over us. His Right to give us any Commands at all must be built on this; and therefore a quick Sense of it is by no Means a slight Matter, but a Point of the utmost Importance to us. But how may this be done most effectually? By prescribing nothing but Matters of a purely moral Nature? This surely cannot be maintained on our Author's Principles, who asserts in some Places, that Matters of this Kind being excellent in themselves, are equally obligatory, whether God shall command them or no. If this be true, and Men are really obliged to certain Actions from the Nature of Things, without con-

sidering them as the Will of God, I cannot for my Life see how the Performance of them is any Expression of our Obedience to him. How do we express any Regard to his Authority, or acknowledge his Dominion at all, whilst in every Article we perform nothing, which we were not equally concerned to perform, and which we would not equally have perform'd, tho' God should be supposed entirely unconcerned about it?

The Case indeed is somewhat different upon my Principles. I have endeavour'd to deduce all moral Obligation from the Will of God. On this Foot virtuous Performances will be Acts of Obedience to him; and consequently, Acknowledgments of his Authority. But then, as our Obligation, strictly speaking, must be built on the Will of God, so a Sense of his Authority must be impressed on us in the first Place; otherwise we shall perform Acts of moral Virtue upon Principles which will not make them Instances of Obedience; we shall perform them merely, because we like to do so; and if we lik'd to do the contrary, we might as easily be led to do it. Now, as in Commands purely positive, we have none other Reason to determine us, but the Will of the wise Prescriber, so by our Obedience we do the most fully express our Sense of his Authority. To give Men such Commands therefore, is a proper Tryal or Exercise of their Obedience; it serves



## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 201

serves to impress on them, and to cultivate in them a Sense of God's supreme Authority: And consequently, as something of this Kind is expedient in order to lay the Foundation of our Obedience more firmly, so it might be presumed, if God should ever vouchsafe us a Revelation of his Will, some Precepts of this Nature would be given us.

It will be vain to alledge, That this is to command for commanding Sake, and to deprive Men of their Liberty without any View, End or Reason whatsoever. This is frequently affirm'd by our Author; but with how little Justice, we shall see immediately. Thus much indeed must be own'd (and I have noted it heretofore) that as the Matter of such positive Commands must be in its own Nature indifferent, so there can be no such Reason for the particular Command, which shall make it absolutely necessary to be given; yet still, there may be a general Reason why something of this Kind should be enjoined. And for this it would be sufficient to alledge, had we nothing else to offer, That whilst it exercises our Obedience, it cultivates in our Minds a Sense of the Divine Authority. This surely is an End not unworthy of Regard. For tho' the Act prescribed be in itself indifferent, yet the Obedience shewn by performing it is moral, and the End promoted by the Exercise of this Obedience excellent. It habitu-

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ates us to a Sense of our absolute Dependance on the supreme Being ; and consequently, hath a general Influence on the Practice of all our religious Duties.

A second Reason why we might reasonably expect, if God should grant us Revelation, it would contain some Matters of a positive Kind, shall be This ; Precepts of this Nature may serve to promote the Uniformity and better Order of outward Religion. What I design in this Place, hath a principal Regard to religious Worship ; which, however plain and certain a Duty it may be in general, yet the particular Manner of performing it, cannot be so easily determined, if at all.

I am not here concerned about the several inward Acts of Devotion. These may be discovered by human Reason in the same Way that the Necessity of Devotion in general is discovered. The Point at present is of a different Nature. It relates to the outward Forms and Rites of Worship. To determine these is surely a Matter of some Consequence : And tho' it should be supposed, that there are various Ways in which they may be determined with equal Advantage ; and consequently, that it is in itself indifferent which Way they be determined ; yet it is by no means indifferent whether they be at all determined any way.

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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 203

It hath been observed under the former Chapter, that publick Worship cannot be performed without some Rites and Ceremonies : To which I shall add here, that Order and Decency must require likewise, that the same Ceremonies should be observ'd by all ; at least, where several Persons are at the same Time, and jointly concerned in the same Kind of Worship. This is so very apparent, that I shall not give myself the Trouble of a Proof : For to assert the contrary, is to maintain, either that Uniformity doth not contribute to Order, or that Order is of no Consequence in the publick Worship of God. He who can dispute either of these Points is not to be argued with. Now if this be allowed, then there ought to be some Rule, which all who join themselves in publick Worship are concerned to follow ; and how such a Rule may be sufficiently established, is the Question.

Our Author perhaps will tell us, That the Fitness of the Thing is the Rule ; and farther, that this Rule is enforced on us by our common Reason. Very well : But then it deserves to be considered at the same time, that there may be several Rites equally suitable to the Worship we are to perform. If this shall prove the Case, the Fitness of the Thing can be no Rule at all ; for where several Things are equally fit, there it is impossible to make a Choice from the mere  
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Consideration of Fitness; and consequently, we must have Recourse to something else in order to fix and determine us.

If our Author shall reply, That in Cases where it is entirely indifferent what Men chuse, each Man hath a Right to determine for himself; This might be said with some Shew, were the Thing of private Concern. But as we are now speaking, not concerning the Rites of private Worship, but of publick, so I conceive the Case is widely different: For, in this Case Uniformity requires that the Rites used by different Persons should be the same: But can Uniformity be maintained on this Foot? Or rather, were every Thing left to private Choice, would there not be almost as many different Rites as there are different Men?

Or, if to guard against this Inconvenience it be affirm'd, that such Matters ought to be determined by our Superiors; I must so far agree as to allow, that this may properly be done, where nothing of this Kind is determined by any higher Power. But then it should be remembred, that if Determinations may be made, and Things of this Nature may be prescribed to us by our Superiors, surely God hath an equal Right to do the same: And if it be upon several Accounts fit and proper that such Matters should be determin'd, I cannot see why God may not as reasonably determine them as Man;

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especially since the Divine Authority is much more indisputable, and such, as must (if Men are thoroughly persuaded of its being Divine) have an infinitely greater Weight with them.

I am aware it will be alledged (for it hath several Times been suggested to us by this very Writer) That eternal Disputes may arise about Positive Injunctions; -- That almost all the Quarrels which have ever been about religious Matters have arisen from hence; -- That these have given Birth to Persecution and Cruelty, and to almost every Calamity which can happen. From whence our Author would have it concluded, that every Thing of this kind should be thrown entirely out of Religion; and that the supreme Being cannot interpose in an Affair, where his very Interposition must prejudice the Ends of Religion itself. As I have not taken Notice of this Objection any where else, I shall desire Leave to offer some Remarks on it here.

It is asserted in the Objection, that almost all the Quarrels which have ever happen'd about religious Matters, have related to things purely Positive, and arisen from the Determinations given concerning them. But then I must desire to know, how, and by what Means have they arisen? From their being really made and given us by God? This ought to be intended in the Ob-

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*This is a jesuitical Section, but  
if it is understood thus, it has no  
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*Jesuitism 206*

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Objection; For if any thing else be meant by it, the Divine Interposition in Matters of this Nature is not affected in the least. But this is so far from being true, *\* that* such Quarrels have ever arisen from God's *\* Determinations*, that had *\* Matters* been so determin'd, and acknowledg'd on all hands to have been so, no Quarrels could probably have arisen about them. *\* For*, however Men may frequently neglect things which they acknowledge to be their Duty, it is scarce ever seen that they directly and obstinately oppose them. It seems rather that the Consequences above-mention'd are owing to the Want of a divine Determination. For if That would probably have compos'd Matters, the Calamities insisted on are not the Effects of Divine Determination, but Human.

The Truth of the Case is plainly this: In order to enforce positive Injunctions more strongly on the World, Those who had not Credit or Power enough of their own to influence Mankind, have pretended to a Divine Authority, which they really wanted. Such Pretences, we may easily imagine, would sometimes be opposed with Vigour; and by how much the more they were opposed on the one hand, by so much the more eagerly would they be contended for by the opposite Party. Hence 'tis that such Quarrels have arisen. Those who had no sufficient Authority of their own, were resolved to carry



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carry their Point by bringing God into the Question. The Consequence of this is plain enough. Nothing could be expected to arise, but bitter Animosity, Persecution, Cruelty, with every thing else which might serve to support a weak and unjustifiable Cause. But must this be charged to the Account of Divine Positive Injunctions? Is it not owing entirely to the Wickedness of Men, who have many times profan'd God's Name, by making him the Author of such things as have been the Effects of their own Folly? The Objection then amounts to this, and this only; God cannot give us any Positive Precepts, however serviceable the giving them may prove to us,—because wicked Men have sometimes pretended his Authority,—have prescrib'd the most trifling and ridiculous Things,—and enforc'd them on the World by all the Methods of Cruelty and Terror: Or, if you please, There can be no good Coin, nor any Authority any where lodg'd of making it current,---because, this may sometimes be counterfeited, and the Publick suffer by the Artifice of Impostors.

But to return to the direct Proof of the Point before me. I have observed, that the Decency and Order of religious Worship seem to require some Positive Institutions:—That if nothing of this kind be prescribed by God, it must be done, either by each Man distinctly by himself; or else, by



our lawful Superiors. I have observed further, that if Matters of this kind were entirely referr'd to each Man's private Discretion, there would probably be almost as many different Rites as there are different Men. The Consequence must be, not only the Destruction of Decency and Order, but likewise of publick and joint Worship itself; For, Men cannot be said to perform those Offices jointly, in which they are found almost entirely to differ from each other. Nor can this be done so advantageously by our Superiors; not only, because their Authority, in Matters of this kind, will be sometimes question'd, and consequently be so far ineffectual,——but likewise, because the Exercise of such a Power must be liable to all those Errors, to which Human Nature itself is subject. I think we may fairly conclude from hence, that in Matters which have so immediate a Regard to God himself, He would interpose, and give Men some Directions, if He should ever interpose in an extraordinary Way at all;——That He would settle certain Matters at least in the Ceremonial of his own Worship; and afford his Creatures the Satisfaction of thinking, that whilst they address themselves to him, they do it in that way, which is upon all Accounts the best, because prescribed by that very Being they worship.

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3. To what hath been already offer'd I shall add a Third Argument, *viz.* We might reasonably expect some Positive Institutions, if God should ever reveal himself at all, for the better Promotion of inward and sincere Piety. I do suppose here, that inward and sincere Piety is the Thing which renders Men acceptable to God; and proportionably as they make greater Advances and Improvements this Way, so shall they obtain greater Degrees of Favour. This, doubtless, must be the main Point aim'd at by a Wise and Good Being, whenever He makes any extraordinary Manifestations of himself. A Revelation therefore cannot be designed merely to lay greater Burthens upon us; It must be intended to give us a more exact, perfect, and distinct View of what is fit and proper to be done;—To enforce the Rule more strongly;—To recommend it more powerfully; and to put us in a better way, not only of acting, but likewise of cultivating those Habits and Dispositions, which are of a moral or religious Nature.

Now there are Two Ways especially in which Positive Institutions may be, in this respect, serviceable.

1. By guarding us against such Temptations as we may not be able to conquer easily. And,

2. By suggesting to our Minds such Sentiments as are of a moral or religious Nature.

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If there are certain Things which have been generally abused, and human Frailty is such, that it cannot well be expected but they will be abused; an Injunction that Men should abstain entirely from these things is by no means improper. And yet, if the Abuse be not absolutely unavoidable, the Injunction will not be absolutely necessary; and consequently, if any thing of this kind should ever be given us, it must be Positive, there being nothing in the nature of Things which can make an Abstinence of this kind universally incumbent on us. In Matters of a Civil Nature we expect such Directions from a Wise and Good Governour. Why therefore might not the like be hoped for from the All-wise Governour of the World, should the Circumstances of Things make them fit and proper to be given? This Remark will sufficiently justify several Institutions in the Law of *Moses*; which being delivered to a particular People, and intended to guard them against such Errors as they were more especially expos'd to, are of such a Nature as might reasonably be expected should God ever reveal to them any Law at all.

But the main Thing I would chuse to observe here, is, the Usefulness of certain Institutions, as they are capable of suggesting our Minds such Sentiments as are of a moral or religious Nature. Such Helps as the



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# REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 211

would indeed be needless, if Men were perfect either as to their intellectual or moral Capacities; if they were patient to attend, and quick to discern the Fitness and Reason of Things; if they were always mindful of what they once knew; if they were dispos'd of themselves to discharge their Duty when known; and, lastly, if no foreign Temptations were apt to draw them off from their good Purposes. But this is far from being the present State and Condition of Human Nature. Men are unapt to think and consider sufficiently; They are heedless, forgetful; exposed to numberless Temptations; and, which is worse, they are exceeding liable to be seduced by them. In this View of things we need not only a System of moral Precepts to direct us, but likewise a Scheme of moral Discipline, by which these Precepts may be rendered more effectual. This we cannot so well fix and settle for ourselves. Every one cannot so easily discern the remote Influence of certain Things on their Virtue; or, if they could, yet they would not think themselves concerned to practise Matters which are not direct Instances of Virtue. Besides, that many Things receive a Usefulness this way from the mere Will of the Institutor. Something of this Kind is apparent even in civil Matters. X The Seal is a Token of Confirmation, which receives its Signification not from any thing in its own Nature, but

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again talks*

*Seals impertinently*



only the Appointment of Laws. So likewise certain Things may be prescribed by the Supreme Being, as Hints and Intimations of our Duty; which being so prescribed, shall obtain a Signification, and, in their Use, suggest those Reflections which are of the highest moral Importance.

Shall any one then affirm, that Matters of this Nature are utterly unworthy of God; —that because they may not be in themselves excellent, they must therefore be entirely useless; —that as such, they must be excluded out of Religion; and that God himself cannot impose them? This Conclusion is so absolutely wrong, and judg'd to be so by all Mankind, that no Religion hath ever yet subsisted, whether really or pretendedly reveal'd, which hath not contain'd in it something of this Nature.

The first, and indeed the only reveal'd Precept which *Moses* represents as given to our first Parents, in the very State of Innocence, was of a Positive Kind; from the Violation of which, Sin entered into the World, and Death by Sin. And in those Manifestations which are said to have been afterwards made to the Patriarchs, we find the same. *Noah* and *Abraham* are Instances of this, too well known to be disputed. As to the Law delivered to the *Jews*, the Matter is so very plain, that one Objection which our Author hath suggested to the Disadvantage

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of that Law is built on this very Consideration : And in Reference to Christianity, I need not prove, what every Christian who knows his Religion at all, acknowledges. This Gentleman may, if he pleases, dispute whether any Thing of this Kind ought originally to have been prescribed by our Religion ; but, whether it actually hath been so or not, cannot sure be question'd. Amongst the several Religions of the ancient *Gentiles*, doth it appear that there was ever any One of them, which did not prescribe some Matters Positive, if those Matters may be allowed to be Positive, which are not founded on the moral Reasons of Things ? In Truth, they carried Matters of this Kind into Extremes ; and whilst they pretended to support Religion, they injur'd it : For, they not only over-burthen'd true Piety by too numerous Ceremonies, but frequently prescribed such as were really inconsistent with it. Yet in these Things the greatest Part of the Religion they taught consisted. They imagin'd that scarce any Thing else was pleasing to God : And in this they agreed entirely in the general, however they might differ from each other as to the particular Ceremonies they practised. To come down lower ; Do we not see the same in the Religion of *Mahomet* ? And do not all the Accounts given us, concerning the several Religions profess'd amongst the Heathens to this Day,



confirm it likewise? This is so well known, that as I would not trouble the Reader with needless Proofs, so I presume our Author, who complains so much of the Superstition of Mankind, will not expect it. How much soever we may differ from each other in our Sentiments on other Points, yet I flatter myself we shall easily agree in this Point of Fact.

But if this once be admitted, then I must demand of this Gentleman, whether any One of all these several Religions did really proceed from God in the Way of Revelation? If he shall answer me in the Affirmative, then the Point I have been hitherto contending for, is allowed me; and certain Things may be, and actually are Matters of Reveal'd Religion, which do not belong to Natural. But, if on the other hand, he shall answer in the Negative (as the main Design of his Book manifestly shews he must) then I may draw an Argument from the Concurrence of Mankind in this one general Point, notwithstanding their wide Difference from each other in Particulars; and set the united Opinion of the World in all Ages of it, against the particular Opinion of this single Gentleman. Be it (as this Gentleman is disposed to think) that those who have professed any of these several Religions, have either forged them, or given too easy Credit to Forgeries; yet still their Opinion, that Positive

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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 215

Precepts might proceed from God, is clear and manifest. Had they thought otherwise, or had this Point been so plainly demonstrable in the Negative, as our Author would have us believe, would every one of those who pretended to teach a Religion as from God, have run into this Blunder? Would he have imposed Things on the World as the Will of God, of which he was not only conscious that they had no such Foundation, but which he knew God could not possibly be the Author of; nay, which were so plainly contrary to his Will, that he could not expect but the Forgery must betray it self? Wise and crafty Men do not act in this Manner: And therefore we must conclude, that the mixing some Positive Precepts with other Matters in Religion, was what all the World presum'd would be the Case, should God ever reveal himself at all: Otherwise such Impostors would not have run the Risque; or if they had, they could not always have succeeded; Some Religion or other would have subsisted without any Institutions, at least without such as were pretended to have come from God.

Thus I have, in this Place, carried the Point with regard to positive Precepts somewhat farther than I did in the last Chapter. All that I contended for under that Head, was, That such Precepts might be given us, and that our Author's Objections to the con-

trary were inconclusive. Here I have not only insisted that such Precepts may be given us, but endeavoured to shew likewise, that some such might reasonably be expected, if God should ever reveal himself at all; and this I have supported from the Reason of the Thing, and the concurrent Sense of Mankind in all Ages of the World. If this Arguing be just, then it follows clearly, That Natural and Reveal'd Religion are Not necessarily one and the same, but that certain Points may, and probably would become Matter of the one, which do not at all belong to the other.

But what then, it will be perhaps be said; Is this the whole in which Reveal'd Religion differs from Natural? Is it worthy the extraordinary Interposition of an all-wise Being to prescribe those Things, which by being indifferent, might as well have been let alone? Is this all the Perfection which Reveal'd Religion hath above Natural, That it makes some Things necessary to be done or avoided by us, which have no Excellency in themselves, and therefore cannot contribute to the Excellency of Religion? At this Rate Men might as well have been left to themselves.

In Reply to which, I must observe, That Positive Institutions, considered either as Marks of God's Authority, and of our Dependence on him;—or, as Determinations of something proper to be determined in the

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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 217

Exercise of our outward Piety ; — or, as Means whereby inward Religion is cultivated and improved, are not Matters of such flight Importance as the Objection supposes ; and therefore, upon Supposition that the several Particulars of inward Religion were so clear and indisputable, as to need no farther Manifestation, yet still these Aids and Assistances for the more orderly and better Practice of it would not be Matters unworthy of the Divine Care. The Things prescrib'd, tho' allow'd to be indifferent in such a Sense, that they were not originally necessary, nor Matters of natural Duty, yet might not, (as the Objection affirms,) be as well let alone, if there are any real Uses of them, or Advantages to be obtained by them : And Things which have no Excellency in themselves, and therefore are not excellent in an *absolute* Sense, may yet have a *relative* Excellency ; and when considered in this View, may contribute to the Excellency of that Scheme, the Design of which is not only to teach us the best Precepts, but to accommodate them to the present Condition of Man. Upon this State of the Matter it will appear, that Positive Precepts may very fitly be given us by God ; and that it is not, and cannot be quite as well for us to be left entirely to ourselves.

However, I must desire not to be misunderstood here. I do by no Means affirm, that



that This is the Whole in which Natural and Reveal'd Religion differ from each other. There are other Articles of much higher Importance, to which we are concerned to attend carefully, in order to have a full View of this Matter.

It should be remembred then, that human Reason, even in its best State, is imperfect: And tho' it must be allowed, that nothing can be, strictly speaking, a natural Duty, which is not discoverable by natural Reason, yet there may be several other Matters of Consequence to be known; Things which would contribute highly to our Perfection, and consequently, to our Happiness. Now, if a Revelation, I mean, a Revelation of a Rule of Life, should be given us, it would surely include some Matters either not knowable at all on any other Supposition, or at least not knowable in the same Degrees of Clearness and Perfection: And if these should become Parts of it, then there will be a main Difference between them as to the Subject of each, over and above the particular Ways of conveying this Knowledge.

Thus, if there be any References or Relations of the Supreme Being to us, besides those which our Reason teaches from the Certainty of Creation and Providence, it may be of Importance to us to know these Relations: A Fitness of certain Actions may result from them; and the Knowledge of  
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such Relations may shew them to be God's Will, and bind them on us as Duties. Or, if our Reason should be so weak as not to make out exactly the several Dependencies of one Thing upon another, and to trace out the Fitness of Things in a long Course of Reasoning (which is the Case, I will not say barely of the Generality in many Things, but of All in some) a Divine Revelation may remedy these Imperfections; — may either shew, how these Deductions may be made, mark out the several Steps, and settle Matters on their proper Principles; — or else, (which is to us the same) may enforce on us the Conclusion as the Will of God, without pointing out the Reason of the Thing at all. Is not this then desirable? And would not a serious Person, who thinks himself concerned to act what is fit and proper, wish, that where his own natural Discernment fails him, he might be inform'd some other Way? If this be the Case, then something of this Kind might be hoped for, if God should ever vouchsafe us a Revelation; and this is so entirely agreeable to his Attributes, that I cannot see how any one, who hath a due Sense of them, can dispute it. Here then are two Particulars more, in which Reveal'd Religion might differ from Natural, and probably would do so, *viz.* As to Principles or Doctrines not discoverable by natural Light; and likewise as to Precepts, which  
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tho' founded in the Reason of Things, yet are not knowable in the Use of our Reason.

Or, if these Matters are, or may be known by us in some Measure, whilst we use the Faculties given us; yet possibly the Knowledge, in this Way attainable, may be difficult to be gain'd; may be short and imperfect; may be in several Respects indistinct. In such a Case Revelation may make Matters easy; may save us the Pains of hard Study, and long Deduction; may clear up Things farther than our natural Reason may be able to do; in short, may set them in a fuller View, and a stronger Light. Let this then be the Case; Will not Reveal'd Religion differ from Natural, somewhat more than barely the Manner of making Things known to us? Will it not likewise differ in the Degree and Perfection of that Knowledge which is acquired? Admitting that the heavenly Bodies may be viewed by the naked Eye, yet will the Use of Telescopes discover nothing farther? And shall any one assert, that because these Bodies may be discerned, in some Sort, both Ways, therefore the Discoveries made in each differ none otherwise than as to the particular Methods of making them? This Instance is exactly similar to the former; and therefore, the same Judgment must be passed on both.

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To go on; Tho' it might, from considering the Nature of Things, be known, that a certain Course of Life is fit and proper, and upon that account the Will of God, yet still there is something farther necessary in order to influence our Actions. As there are Temptations to be combated,—and many Difficulties in a virtuous Course to be overcome, so it is necessary that there should be something more to move us than the mere Reason of the Thing, or Beauty of Virtue. For, let us suppose, that these Considerations are sufficient to determine a reasonable Being, yet what if Men are not dispos'd to attend to Reason; what if we subsist in a corrupted State, and under a wrong Bias? Then something else may be needful to keep them within proper Bounds.

It must be confessed indeed, that Natural Reason may give us some Relief here. What God wills, must be approved and rewarded by him; and that which is inconsistent with his Will, must be condemn'd and punished in the Doer. This is certain in the general; and every Man is capable of getting some Light into it. But yet, as 'tis necessary, in order to discern this Matter fully, that Men should be able to think closely, and to pursue an Argument thro' a long Chain of Reasoning; so the Generality of Mankind cannot carry it so far, as it may per-

perhaps, in the Nature of Things, be carry'd. Or, if they should be able to do this, yet the whole Amount of their Discoveries will be, that something Good or Ill shall await us, as the Reward or Punishment of our Behaviour: But What, or When, or Where; — These are Matters which human Reason cannot at all reach to. A Revelation therefore, in this Case, may discover something more than Natural Religion teaches; and consequently, upon this View of the Matter, may be more full and extensive than mere Natural Religion is, or can be.

I might observe farther, That as Natural Religion prescribes to us certain Duties; and may give us some Assurance of Acceptance with God upon the Performance of these Duties; so, if we violate them, it must leave us under That Sentence, which our Sins deserve. For we neither do, nor can possibly know for certain, in the mere Use of our Reason, how far God will remit those Punishments we have incurr'd. But yet, God may make known to us his intended Proceedings in this Case by Revelation; which, if he should do, another Article of Difference will arise, and that of the utmost Consequence, to have some Assurance in: For certainly nothing can be more desirable than to have some Light into an Affair, in which we are concern'd so deeply, and by which

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which our Conduct in our future Course will be so greatly influenced. In these, as well as some other Particulars, which have been suggested heretofore, Reveal'd Religion may differ from Natural; and in these it might be expected it would differ, if God should ever grant us a Revelation. We may conclude therefore, that they are so far from being necessarily One and the Same, as This Gentleman contends, that the contrary is true; a very important Difference in the Matter of each being in several respects fit and proper.

But, when I assert a Difference between these two Laws, both which must be the Will of the same infinitely Wise and Gracious Governor, I do not mean by it a Difference of *Opposition*, or, that the one shall really contradict and destroy the other. This must not be affirm'd by any means. What is, in its Nature, fit and proper, must be agreeable to the Will of God: What is, in its Nature, unfit and improper, must be disagreeable thereto: And these, as far as they are discoverable by us in the Use of Reason, and consider'd as the Divine Command, constitute the Law, or Religion of Nature. This Law, (as I have allow'd heretofore) is immutable, in such a Sense, that all Circumstances continuing the same, the Fitness the same, and the Knowledge of that Fitness the same likewise, it must perpetually oblige.

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It is very true therefore, as our Author hath maintain'd, "that Reveal'd Religion cannot command what Natural Religion forbids; nor, on the other hand, can it forbid what that commands." p. 67. From hence it follows, that their Precepts must be entirely consistent with each other; and tho' in some respects different, yet in none *contrary*.

I do maintain likewise, that the several Precepts of Natural Religion, must be either suppos'd or express'd in Reveal'd; and consequently, will thus far become Parts of it, and be confirm'd by it. So far as this They are One and the same: One, as a Part is One with the Whole, which includes that Part in it; and different, as a Whole is different from a single Part, to which, by the Superaddition of other Parts, it becomes a Whole.

But such a Difference as this, our Author tells us, will amount to an Opposition: and his Argument is this; That the Law of Nature being of a certain Extent, whatsoever is not contain'd under it, either as commanded or forbidden, must be indifferent; and consequently, what God, by this Law, leaves us at Liberty about. If therefore any thing shall afterwards be required or forbidden by Revelation, which was not so determin'd by the Law of Nature, this will be a restraining our Liberty, and a Contradiction



diction to that Part of the Law of Nature which before allow'd it. See our Author's own Words: "To suppose that God, by the Law of Nature, leaves Men at Liberty in all indifferent Things; and yet, by a positive Law, restrains this Liberty in certain Parts and Ages of the World, is to suppose God determines one Way by immediate, and another Way by mediate Revelation; both Laws too subsisting at the same Time." p. 134.

This is an Argument so much out of the Way, and of so little Force, that I am really surpriz'd it should proceed from our Author, who is capable of saying Things which have a much better Shew of Reasoning. It will not be expected that I should seriously reply to such Arguing as this. It will be sufficient just to observe, that upon this Foot, every new Law, enacted by the Civil Power, is an Opposition to, and a Subversion of the Laws before subsisting; and this notwithstanding it should only supply their Defects, and carry on the same End with them: For, in this Case likewise a Liberty allow'd by the preceding Laws, is restrain'd by the succeeding; and consequently, as our Author expresses it, the Law-giver determines one Way by one Set of Laws, and another Way by another; both too subsisting at the same Time. Yet he scarce expects by such kind of Objections to

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wrest from The Supreme Power the Authority of making new Laws; nor will He, I believe, affirm, That every new Act is virtually a Repeal of all those which were ever made before.

Be it then, that forasmuch as Natural Religion must, one Way or other, be contained under Reveal'd; — must be either suppos'd or express'd in it, and confirm'd by it, and, so far as this, One with it: Be it, that *Christianity* is in this respect, a *Republication of the Law of Nature*, and consequently, so far as this Matter of it reaches, *as Old as the Creation*; yet what will all this avail, if allow'd, as allow'd indeed it must be? We contend, that altho' it be a Republication of the Law of Nature, yet it may be, and actually is, something more; and that notwithstanding this Unity in one respect, there is a Difference sufficient between them in Others.

Natural and Reveal'd Religion, we affirm, differ in Extent. Under which Head we may reckon, 1. Principles, discover'd by Revelation, which are absolutely undiscoverable by natural Reason. 2. Precepts; some of which tho' founded on the Reasons of Things, yet cannot be trac'd out by us in our present Circumstances; and others God hath prescribed to us, as Tokens of his Authority, — for the Decency of his Worship, — or, for the Increase and Advancement of inward Piety.

They differ again, in Point of Clearness, with respect to those Things, which tho' discoverable in some sort both Ways, are yet not so fully made known to us in the mere Use of Reason, as they are by express Revelation from God: And tho' their Difference is not Such under this Article, as what we affirm'd under the former, yet it amounts to somewhat more than our Author allows, who hath contended that Natural and Reveal'd Religion differ only as to the manner of being communicated to us.

They differ, Lastly in Efficacy; For Revelation establishes such Sanctions both of Reward and Punishment as mere human Reason could never discover; It gives us Assurance of full Pardon upon Repentance; and the Comfort of hoping for the Aids of the Holy Spirit in the Discharge of those Things, which may otherwise prove too difficult for us, whether from the Urgency of Temptations, or the Infirmary of our Nature.

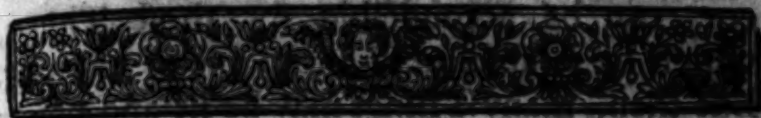
These are such important Articles of Difference, and so plainly visible in the Christian Scheme, that to deny there can be any Difference between Natural and Reveal'd Religion, is virtually a Denial of Revelation itself: And to affirm in the Gross, and without any Distinction, that *Christianity is as Old as the Creation*, is to affirm, that all which is proper and peculiar to Christianity, and upon Account of which it passes under that Denomination, is groundless and an Imposture; to affirm which,



is not only to make it Not as Old as the Creation, but to deny it any manner of Existence as a real Religion at all.

To conclude this Head; If the Matter of Revelation may differ from the Matter of Natural Religion; — If it may fairly be presum'd that the Matter of each would differ in some sort, if a Revelation should be ever given us at all; — If every Religion, which hath yet been offer'd to the World as Reveal'd, hath differ'd from Natural Religion; — and if that in particular, which, upon the best Grounds imaginable, we receive as Reveal'd, doth actually contain some such Articles of Difference; then, I conceive, Nothing farther need be offer'd in Disproof of our Author's bold Assertions. I shall therefore pass on to some other Points; and endeavour to support, in the following Chapters, The Usefulness, Expediency, and Reality of a Revelation against the Objections of This Gentleman.





# C H A P. V.

*Whether a proper Rule of Life be perfectly and easily discoverable by every Man, even by those of the meanest Capacity.*



**T**HIS General Question resolves itself into these Two; viz. 1. Whether a proper Rule of Life be perfectly discoverable by every Man, &c. 2. Whether it be easily discoverable. Concerning both these somewhat hath been occasionally observ'd before; But as the more full Discussion of these Questions belongs to this Place, I shall here pursue them.

Yet, before I proceed, one Thing must be noted carefully, namely, That I am not here debating concerning That Law, from which Duty, strictly speaking, arises, but that Rule of Fitness, which, if discover'd, and consider'd as the Will of God, would constitute our Law. What each Man is properly oblig'd to in Point of Duty, is doubtless knowable by each Man. In this respect the very meanest hath a Sufficiency of Knowledge; and that

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for the Reason formerly insisted on, That no one can be accountable for those Things, which he is absolutely incapable of knowing. But then, many Things may be fit and proper to be done, and therefore fall under That general Rule, which I call the proper Rule of Life, which yet may, on several Accounts, exceed the Discoveries of certain Persons. This must be allow'd to be possible at least, by those who consider Fitness as Something founded in the Natures of Things, and consequently, as having no Relation to the Thoughts, and Apprehensions of Men concerning it. But supposing this to be possible in Theory, yet whether it be Fact or no, is another Point, and the Question which comes now to be consider'd.

From the foregoing Distinction, carefully attended to, it will appear, that all such Arguings as these are vain, " That if God hath given  
 " Mankind a Law, He must have given them  
 " sufficient Means of knowing it: He would  
 " otherwise have defeated his own Intention in  
 " giving it." p. 3. " That as Men have no  
 " other Faculties to judge with, [but their Reason,] so their using these after the best manner  
 " they can, must answer the End for which  
 " God gave them, and justify their Conduct;  
 " That if God will judge all Mankind as they  
 " are accountable, *i. e.* as they are rational,  
 " the Judgment must hold an exact Proportion  
 " to the Use they make of their Reason, and



“ it would be in vain to use it, if the due Use  
“ of it would not justify them before God. ”

p. 5, 6. All these, and such like Arguings,  
are nothing at all to the Purpose. For, What  
if Men, by doing their Best, may be justify'd;  
or, rather, if you please, What if upon this Sup-  
position they cannot be condemn'd in Equity?  
Doth this prove at all, that every Thing,  
in its own Nature fitting, is therefore knowable,  
by every Man? And if this be not knowable by  
every Man, in the Use of his Reason, then a  
Revelation may be exceedingly serviceable in  
order to make it so. The Terms *Law* and  
*Duty* ought not to mix themselves in the Que-  
stion before us. The Point at present is, Not  
whether every Man is capable of knowing all  
that He is strictly oblig'd to, — but, whe-  
ther every Man hath Abilities and Opportunities  
sufficient for discovering every thing which may  
be fit and proper to be done. And that our  
Author thinks every Man, even those of the  
lowest Parts, and meanest Capacities, are ca-  
pable of doing this, will, I conceive appear  
from several Passages of his Book; tho' He  
hath study'd Confusion so much, and express'd  
himself in so odd a Manner, that it may not be  
always easy to fix and settle his Meaning.

I have shewn heretofore, that however  
truly, in the Beginning of his Second Chapter,  
he defines The Law or Religion of Na-  
ture, yet he immediately deserts his own De-  
finition, and tells us, “ that The Religion of  
“ Nature takes in every thing, which is  
“ founded

“founded in the Nature and Reason of  
 “Things.” It is on this foot he argues all  
 throughout his Book; and therefore, where-  
 ever he speaks of *Religion, True Religion,*  
*Natural Religion, Law of Nature, God's*  
*Law,* and the like, he must be understood  
 to include under it, every Thing in itself  
 fit and proper; or, what I have call'd above  
 A proper Rule of Life. This being noted  
 in order to understand what our Author  
 means, I shall proceed to some of those Pas-  
 sages, in which his Opinion on the present  
 Point is represented to us.

To this Purpose he tells us, “that the  
 “End for which God hath given us Reason,  
 “is, to compare Things, and from thence  
 “to judge concerning the Fitness or Unfitness  
 “of Actions. And could not our Reason  
 “judge soundly in all such Matters, it could  
 “not have answer'd the End for which Infi-  
 “nite Wisdom and Goodness bestow'd that  
 “excellent Gift,” p. 26. Here he claims  
 to Human Reason an unlimited Extent; as to  
 the Fitness or Unfitness of Actions. And tho'  
 he asserts this to Human Reason in the gene-  
 ral only, yet the Foundation of his Arguing  
 will make it equally applicable to every Man's  
 Reason. He builds his Argument on the End  
 for which Human Reason was given us;  
 which being the same in all, the same Pri-  
 vileges are virtually here asserted to all; and  
 consequently every Man, even those of the  
 meanest

meanest Abilities, must be (according to him) capable, as of comparing Things, and from thence judging concerning the Fitness or Unfitness of Actions, so likewise of judging soundly in all such Matters. Again, "I cannot help thinking, but (such is the Divine Goodness) God's Will is so clearly and fully manifested in the Book of Nature, that he who runs may read it. This cannot be deny'd, if the Book of Nature shews us, in Characters legible by the whole World, the Relation we stand in to God and our Fellow Creatures, and the Duties resulting from thence; for then it must teach us the Whole of our Duty," p. 28. Once more; "'Tis impossible Men should have any just Idea of the Perfection of God, who think that the Dictates of Infinite Wisdom do not carry their own Evidence with them, and are not by their own innate Worth discoverable to all Mankind," p. 125. The same is still more explicitly set forth, p. 198. "Religion, (which way soever reveal'd) carries such internal Marks of Truth, as at all Times and Places shews itself, even to the meanest Capacity, to be the Will of a Being of universal and impartial Benevolence." I might support the same by numberless other Passages to the same Purpose: But, if these are not thought sufficient, I would refer the Reader to our Author's whole Course of

argu-



arguing from p. 278, to p. 283. In Opposition to all which, I shall,

1. Shew directly, that a proper Rule of Life is not perfectly discoverable by every Man, even by those of the meanest Capacity. And,

2. Examine what our Author hath advanced to the contrary.

As to the direct Proof of this Matter, we need go no farther than the common Experience of Mankind; for, I think, we may safely conclude somewhat concerning the Abilities of Men this way from considering what they have actually, and in fact done.

Now, is it seen that Men of the lowest Rank as to intellectual Accomplishments, have so perfect an Acquaintance with every Thing which is fit and proper to be done? Do they shew this upon every Occasion? Have they ever drawn out any fine Systems of Morality? Or, does it appear from their Conduct, that they have so nice, quick, and perfect a Sense of these Things? So far from it; that all other Circumstances being alike, Men are more or less regular in their Conduct in proportion to the Degrees of their intellectual Capacity.

I deny not indeed, but the more general Points are knowable by every Man, even by those of the meanest Parts: And unless they were so, Men could not be reckon'd Moral Agents;

Agents; and consequently, would not properly come within the present Question: But, to discern a Truth in the general; and to be capable either of applying it on every particular Occasion, or of deducing from it all possible Conclusions, are quite different Things. The first Principles of all Sciences are self-evident; and consequently, such as are knowable even by the meanest. This is especially true in mathematical Knowledge. But what then? Is every Man a Mathematician? Or, hath every Man a Sufficiency of Natural Talents whereby to pursue these Principles thro' that infinite Variety of Conclusions, which skilful Persons are able to draw from them? No certainly; And for the same Reason it cannot be concluded, that because the fundamental Principles of Moral Knowledge are open to every Man, Therefore the Whole of Moral Science must be so likewise; or, that because such general Precepts as these, " God is to be honour'd, worshipp'd, " and obey'd; — We ought to do what " Good we can to all, and to abstain from " offering Injury to any; — We ought to " be temperate, sober, chaste, and the like; " — I say, we cannot conclude, that because such Precepts as these may be suppos'd to be obvious, Therefore every thing else is clear, plain and easy.

Every one, who is at all acquainted with Books, knows what Reputation some few of the



the Philosophers have obtain'd by their Moral Systems; tho', by the Way, there are many undeniable Defects in every one of them, and such as we are now able to discern plainly by that Light which Christianity hath given us. But, could this ever have happen'd, had the Subject of Morals been so exceedingly easy, that every Man, even the meanest, might make himself entirely Master of it? Was it ever seen that Mengain'd Credit by performing what every one else was able to perform as well as themselves? On this Foot their Fame was purchas'd at an easy Rate indeed; and, for the future, we must rather admire their good Fortune, than their Merit. But whatever this Gentleman may advance, I cannot think their Reputation will be so easily overthrown. Their Works have hitherto maintain'd their Ground, and will do so, as long as Men have Sense enough to discern what is great in others, or defective in themselves.

In the last Century there arose a very extraordinary Genius for Philosophical Speculations; I mean Mr. *Lock*, the Glory of that Age, and the Instructor of the present. This Gentleman had examin'd into the Nature and Extent of Human Understanding beyond any Person before him, and made such Discoveries as have highly oblig'd the Curious. In the Course of his Enquiries it occur'd to him, from considering the Nature of Moral Ideas, that *Ethicks* was capable of strict Demonstra-



monstration, as well as Mathematicks. He well knew that The Great Masters on the Subject of Morals had done little this Way; and presum'd, (as well he might) that this had hitherto been thought impossible. " Yet, " says he, upon this Ground, (*viz.* the Principles before advanc'd) I am bold to think " Morality is capable of Demonstration, as " well as Mathematicks. " (See his Essay, &c. L. 3. C. 11. §. 16.) See, however, with what Caution this Great Man maintains his Point! He doth not affirm by any means, that every Thing in Morality is capable of being demonstrated; but only, (as he tells us afterwards, L. 4. C. 12. §. 8.) " I doubt not " but, if a right Method were taken, a " great Part of Morality might be made " out with that Clearness, that could leave, " to a considering Man, no more Reason to " doubt, than he could have to doubt of the " Truth of Propositions in Mathematicks, " which have been demonstrated to him. " Doth this look as if he imagin'd that every Man, even those of the meanest Capacities, were thoroughly acquainted with every Thing on this Subject? If he thought so, why does he introduce it as a Discovery, that Morality is capable of Demonstration? And whilst he asserts this, Why doth he assert it with so much Reserve and Caution? Why doth he extend the Assertion Not to the whole of Morality, but to a great Part of it only?

only? To this I must add farther, He doth not, in the last cited Passage, maintain, that every Man is capable, by his own Force, of demonstrating whatsoever is really capable of being demonstrated in Morality; but only, that if a right Method were taken, a great Part of Morality might be made out with that Clearness that could leave *to a considering Man* no more Reason to doubt, &c. — To a considering Man, *i. e.* to one who is willing to attend, and hath Abilities to judge.

Mr. *Lock's* Hints on this Subject were read with great Pleasure by several ingenious Men: Mr. *Molineux*, in particular, was so highly delighted with them, that he could not forbear pressing his Friend to pursue this Matter more distinctly, and to oblige us with a Body of Moral Philosophy drawn up in the demonstrative Way. But how did Mr. *Lock* reply to this? Why, in these Words, “Tho’ by  
“ the View I had of Moral Ideas whilst I  
“ was considering that Subject, I thought I  
“ saw that Morality might be demonstratively  
“ made out, yet whether I am able to make  
“ it out, is another Question. Every one  
“ could not have demonstrated what Mr.  
“ *Newton's* Book hath shewn to be demon-  
“ strable.” [*Lock's* Familiar Letters, p. 10.]  
What then! Was this so difficult a Task to Mr. *Lock*, which yet the meanest, and most illiterate Mechanick is so entirely equal to? Or, did this accurate Reasoner know so little  
of

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of his own Abilities, or judge so meanly of them, as to think himself scarce qualify'd to undertake what, it seems, every Man else was able to do with Ease? This surely cannot be said. And therefore we must conclude, that whatever Abilities the Gentleman I am now contending with may enjoy, and how much soever he may be able to do to this Purpose, in the Use of his Natural Reason, yet every Man is not equally capable of doing the same. Mr. *Lock*, we see, would not attempt it; and therefore it must be vain for others, so very much inferior to this Great Man, to attempt it after him.

We have lately, indeed, had a Noble Performance much in the Way which Mr. *Lock* propos'd; and the Design hath been so well executed by Mr. *Woollaston*, that however some Objections may be made against certain Parts of his Book, yet it hath been receiv'd, in the general, with the highest Applause. I believe it will be allow'd by every one, that This is the most compleat System of Moral Principles and Precepts, which hath been yet given us on the mere Foot of Natural Reason; tho' possibly some one or other may arise hereafter, and carry the Matter still farther. But whence came it to pass, that Mr. *Woollaston* alone should succeed so well, and go so far beyond his Predecessors on this Subject, if the Matter had indeed been so very plain and easy; "if God's Will, [*i. e.* what " is



“ is fit and proper] is so clearly and fully  
 “ manifested in the Book of Nature, that he  
 “ who runs may read it; ” and if “ Reli-  
 “ gion [another Word us’d by our Author  
 “ in the same Sense;] if This, I say, carries  
 “ such internal Marks of Truth, as at all  
 “ Times and Places plainly shews itself even  
 “ to the meanest Capacity, &c. ? ” Surely  
 those Persons who have set so great a Value  
 on Mr. *Woollaston*’s Performance, have not  
 mistaken Matters so much, as to bestow the  
 highest Praise on him for doing what was in  
 itself a mean and low Work, and what  
 every other Person was capable of doing as  
 well as He. Thus much I am sure may be  
 concluded from the general Applause with  
 which this Gentleman’s Book hath been re-  
 ceiv’d, that it was thought to contain some-  
 thing extraordinary; which, if admitted, it  
 must follow of Course, that this Proposition,  
*viz.* A proper Rule of Life is perfectly dis-  
 coverable even by those of the meanest Ca-  
 pacities, is contrary to the common Sense  
 and Experience of the World.

Over and above this Argument drawn  
 from Experience, I shall evince the same  
 from the Nature and Reason of the Thing  
 itself. The Proposition affirm’d by our Au-  
 thor, is thus express’d by him; “ Religion  
 “ [or the proper Rule of Life] carries with  
 “ it such internal Marks of Truth, as at all  
 “ Times and Places plainly shews itself even

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"to the meanest Capacity, &c." I must charge this Proposition with a clear and evident Contradiction; because, if Religion [as he loves to express himself] hath really such internal Marks, as must make it plain and apparent to every Man, then all Men are equally capable of knowing every Thing this Way; and if this be admitted, there can be no such Thing as greater or less Degrees of Capacity. \*How then can there be any Supposition made of the *meanest* Capacity? How can there be different Degrees with regard to a Point in which all are equal? Or, if it shall still be maintain'd, that Capacity, in this respect, doth admit Degrees, then it is evident, that Some are capable of knowing more than Others: And if this be once allow'd, then How is every Man, even he who is supposed to have the meanest Capacity, able to discover every Thing? Turn it which Way you please: Either every Thing on the Subject we are now speaking of, is not equally capable of being known by every one; — or, if it be, there can be no such thing as Degrees of Capacity: For these two are entirely inconsistent with each other.

But our Author will perhaps alledge, that the different Degrees of Capacity refer not to Matters of Morality, (in which respect Men are all equal) but to something else, viz. to Men's general Abilities; and

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that

*\* This is a mean quibble it being plain that the meanest Capacity is not here limited to religious matters, but used colloquially as a way relating to what ever is the object of understanding*

*\* What else can he alledge*

*\*ye every* that it is his Intention to assent, that those  
*thing fit* who are least furnish'd with intellectual Abi-  
*and proper* lities, are capable of discovering *\*every*  
*respectively* Thing which is fit and proper to be done.  
*of each* This possibly may be alledg'd by our Au-  
*particular* thor. But then I must beg leave to remind  
*persons* him of a Passage which occurs at the fifth  
*duty; not* Page of his Book. *\*I* I do not mean by this,  
*with rela-* "that All should have equal Knowledge;  
*tion to his* "but that all should have what is sufficient  
*notional* "for the Circumstances they are in." The  
*abstract* Knowledge here mention'd relates entirely to  
*universal* Matters of Morality; — to Religion, as he  
*Fitness* terms it; — to That Religion, which he  
*which he* supposes to contain every thing morally fit  
*would so* and proper. Here he supposes that all Men  
*frequently* have not equal Knowledge this Way; "I  
*serve him* "do not mean that all should have equal  
*self with* "Knowledge;" What then? Why, "that  
*is here* "every Man should have sufficient for the  
*aiming at* "Circumstances he is in." According to  
*that indeed* this Account there may be higher, or lower  
*contrary* Degrees of Capacity in reference to Moral  
*to y<sup>e</sup> passage* Matters, as no doubt there may: But then,  
*here quoted* upon this State of the Thing, How will he  
*from your book* make good the Proposition I am now op-  
*necessarily* posing, viz. that all Things of moral Im-  
*supposes all* port are plain and evident, and equally ca-  
*should have* pable of being known by every one? —  
*knowledge* Not to insist longer on this, I shall ad-  
*in religious* vance a Step farther, and endeavour to shew  
*matters in* distinctly, from the very Nature of the  
*order to unde-* Sub-  
*stand* here quoted from your Book necessarily  
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Subject, that a proper Rule of Life is not perfectly discoverable by every one, especially by those whom he expressly mentions, Men of the lowest and meanest Capacity. To be perfectly acquainted with this, it is necessary, in the First Place, That all those several Principles should be thoroughly known, from which Moral Precepts may, and ought to be deduc'd; otherwise we must maintain, that Conclusions may be drawn without the Use of Premises. And, in the next Place, that the Connection between these Principles and Precepts is so exceedingly clear, that every Person concern'd may immediately and distinctly discern it in every Instance. On any other Foot, these suppos'd Principles are, with respect to such a Man, no Moral Principles at all; and the Precepts which he lays down for himself, can have no sufficient Force with him, as not being built on any appearing Fitness of the Thing. These Questions therefore arise, Whether a Person of such a suppos'd mean Capacity, may gain a full View of all the several Moral Principles? and, if he may do this, and actually hath done it, Whether he must necessarily be capable of deducing from them all those Moral Conclusions, which may in just Reasoning follow?

The Principles of Moral Science are none other than the Natures of Things, and the several Relations which subsist between

them. Now these are so far from being apparent to every Man, even to those of the meanest Capacities, that I have distinctly shewn under my First Chapter, they are perfectly discoverable by no Man, in the mere Use of Natural Reason. In reference to God, tho' Something may be known, yet it must be confess'd that many Things are secret to us: In reference to ourselves, How many Difficulties may be started even about our own Persons, of which we can give no tolerable Solutions? And if we are so much Strangers to our own personal Condition, How much less can we determine with Certainty as to Things which relate to others? Little do we know concerning the Nature and Powers of visible Beings; and still much less concerning these which are invisible. Now if the Nature, State, and Condition of Things be, in several respects, undiscoverable by us, it is certain that the several Relations which subsist between them must be so likewise. We know God as our Creator and Preserver; but then, there may be several other Relations which he sustains, to us utterly unknown. We are related to other Men as Fellow Creatures of the same Kind: This general Relation we know perfectly: But do we know as perfectly all the other Respects we may have to one another? We may presume, upon strong Reasons, that Men are not the only intelligent creatures in the



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the Universe: But can we say how the Affairs of these intelligent Beings are intermix'd with ours? How far we are mutually depended on one another; and consequently, capable either of forwarding or obstructing our several Interests? We know something of Natural Beings: But are we such compleat Philosophers, as to be intimately acquainted with all their several Powers? And yet, without knowing these, How can we say what is fit to be done or avoided on every Occasion?

Our Author himself builds his Scheme of Duties on the Natures and Relations of Things. In proportion therefore as these several Natures and Relations are undiscoverable by us, so far must our several Schemes of Duty be defective; or, to speak more properly, so far must we fall short in our Description of the proper Rule of Conduct. And if the wisest, and most inquisitive, must frequently be at a Loss, can the meanest gain a perfect Knowledge of these Things? Can the uneducated and illiterate so far exceed the Philosophical Enquirer; and Men of no Parts go so much beyond the greatest and most extensive Genius? At this Rate, Folly can teach us more than Wisdom. — But I forbear, in a case so exceedingly plain, that nothing more is requisite either to illustrate or confirm it.

After all, let us suppose that the several Principles of Moral Science were thoroughly knowable; Will it follow from hence, that all the several Conclusions deducible from them are equally knowable? Doth the like appear in any other Art or Science? Are we to learn, that Truth is almost infinite, whilst the original Principles from which it is deducible, are in many cases few and plain? Are Men therefore able to reach all these Truths; to trace them in all their several Steps; and to make out every Thing which is, in itself capable of being prov'd?

Let us only consider how few and simple the first Principles of Geometry are. These may be known easily by a Person of tolerable Parts and Capacity. But doth it follow, that he is equally capable of mastering the whole Science, and of making out all the several Conclusions of a *Newton*, or a *Halley*? No certainly; and therefore a Distinction ought to be made between the Capacity of apprehending Principles, and of drawing Conclusions. The Ground and Reason of this is plain enough. In order to make out a Conclusion, especially when it is remote from its first and original Principle, Men ought to have a Sagacity in discerning the several Relations between Ideas, a Fix- edness and Attention of Mind, that none of these Relations may escape without sufficient

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Observation, — Patience and Resolution to bear the Fatigues of a painful and laborious Search ; To which may be added, Opportunity and Freedom from such other Engagements as may either embarrass them in the Enquiry, or oblige them to break off too soon. But are all these the Portion of every Man ? Is every Man sagacious, attentive, patient, at leisure ? Whence then comes it to pass that there is really so great a Difference between the intellectual Attainments of Men ? Were every Thing so easy, and attainable in this respect, surely Men could not fall so very short of one another : The mere Pleasure of mastering a Truth would move them, if there were not something of superior Difficulty in the Way.

All this will, perhaps, be allow'd by our Author in reference to what he may call Speculative Science : But he will tell us, that the Case is different with regard to Practical : There every Thing is, and must be easy, and obvious to every Enquirer. But let me ask this Gentleman, Is not Reasoning as necessary to deduce practical Conclusions from practical Principles, as speculative Conclusions from speculative Principles ? Doth not Reasoning, as well in the one Case as the other, imply a Perception of the Connection or Disagreement of Ideas in the several Steps of the Argument ? Doth not this in like manner suppose, that the before-mention'd



Qualifications are equally necessary in both Cases? And if this be true, must there not be Difficulties arising in both?

To make this more apparent, let us only consider That Scheme of Morality, which this Author himself hath given us; Let us see, whether He, with all the Advantages he enjoys of Learning, Parts, Conversation, Leisure, Books, and the like, hath hit matters off so nicely; or, if he shall be suppos'd to have done so, Whether the same might as well have been done by the Illiterate, or the Dull, or the Solitary, or the Busy. If it could not, then I conceive this Point must be yielded me; and the Gentleman I am contending with must allow, that a proper Rule of Life, however discoverable by him, is not so perfectly discoverable by every one.

His Scheme of Natural Religion, is This:  
 " 'Tis evident by the Light of Nature that  
 " there is a God; or, in other Words, a  
 " Being absolutely perfect, and infinitely  
 " happy in himself, who is the Source of  
 " all other Beings. " In the next place,  
 " The Creatures can neither add to, nor  
 " take from the Happiness of that Being;  
 " and he could have no Motive in framing  
 " his Creatures, or, in giving Laws to such  
 " of them, as he made capable of knowing  
 " his Will, but their own Good. " From  
 hence he infers, " That Nothing can be a

" Part

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" Part of the Divine Law, but what tends  
 " to promote the common Interest of his  
 " Rational Creatures; and every Thing  
 " which does so, must be a Part of it." In  
 like manner, " He who cannot envy us any  
 " Happiness our Nature is capable of, can  
 " forbid us those Things only, which tend  
 " to our Hurt." These are the general  
 Principles on which he builds. To which  
 he adds this farther Remark, " Our Reason,  
 " which gives us a Demonstration of the Divine  
 " Perfections, affords the same concerning the  
 " Nature of those Duties God requires; not  
 " only with relation to himself, but to our-  
 " selves, and one another: Those we shall dis-  
 " cern, if we look into ourselves, and consider  
 " our own Natures, and those Circumstances  
 " God hath plac'd us in with relation to our  
 " Fellow-Creatures, and see what conduces  
 " to our mutual Happiness: Of this our  
 " Senses, the Experience of others, as well  
 " as our own, can't fail to give us sufficient  
 " Information."

He had just before mention'd the Three  
 common Heads of Duty, *viz.* those which  
 relate to God, to ourselves, and to one ano-  
 ther. He now proceeds to give us a more  
 distinct Account What those several Duties  
 are. " With relation to ourselves, he tells  
 " us, Forasmuch as God hath endow'd Man  
 " with such a Nature as makes him neces-  
 " sarily desire his own Good, — therefore  
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"to the meanest Capacity, &c." I must charge this Proposition with a clear and evident Contradiction; because, if Religion [as he loves to express himself] hath really such internal Marks, as must make it plain and apparent to every Man, then all Men are equally capable of knowing every Thing this Way; and if this be admitted, there can be no such Thing as greater or less Degrees of Capacity. \*How then can there be any Supposition made of the *meanest* Capacity? How can there be different Degrees with regard to a Point in which all are equal? Or, if it shall still be maintain'd, that Capacity, in this respect, doth admit Degrees, then it is evident, that Some are capable of knowing more than Others: And if this be once allow'd, then How is every Man, even he who is supposed to have the meanest Capacity, able to discover every Thing? Turn it which Way you please: Either every Thing on the Subject we are now speaking of, is not equally capable of being known by every one; — or, if it be, there can be no such thing as Degrees of Capacity: For these two are entirely inconsistent with each other.

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*\* This is a mean quibble, it being plain that the meanest capacity is not here limited to religious matters, but used allegorically relating to what we call the object of understanding.*

*\* What else can he alledge?*

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*\*ye every* that it is his Intention to assert, that those  
*Thing fit* who are least furnish'd with intellectual Abi-  
*and proper* lities, are capable of discovering *\*Every*  
*respectively* Thing which is fit and proper to be done.  
*of each* This possibly may be alledg'd by our Au-  
*particular* thor. But then I must beg leave to remind  
*persons* him of a Passage which occurs at the fifth  
*duty; not* Page of his Book. I do not mean by this,  
*with rela-* "that All should have equal Knowledge;  
*tion to Re-* "but that all should have what is sufficient  
*notional* "for the Circumstances they are in." The  
*abstract* Knowledge here mention'd relates entirely to  
*universal* Matters of Morality; — to Religion, as he  
*Fitness* terms it; — to That Religion, which he  
*which he* supposes to contain every thing morally fit  
*would so* and proper. Here he supposes that all Men  
*frequently* have not equal Knowledge this Way; "I  
*serve him* "do not mean that all should have equal  
*self with* "Knowledge;" What then? Why, "that  
*is here* "every Man should have sufficient for the  
*aiming at* "Circumstances he is in." According to  
*that indeed* this Account there may be higher, or lower  
*contrary* Degrees of Capacity in reference to Moral  
*to y<sup>e</sup> passage* Matters, as no doubt there may: But then,  
*Here quoted from your book necessarily* upon this State of the Thing, How will he  
*Supposes all should have equal knowle* make good the Proposition I am now op-  
*in religious matters in order to undem* posing, viz. that all Things of moral Im-  
*H* port are plain and evident, and equally ca-  
 pable of being known by every one? —  
 Not to insist longer on this, I shall ad-  
 vance a Step farther, and endeavour to shew  
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Subject, that a proper Rule of Life is not perfectly discoverable by every one, especially by those whom he expressly mentions, Men of the lowest and meanest Capacity. To be perfectly acquainted with this, it is necessary, in the First Place, That all those several Principles should be thoroughly known, from which Moral Precepts may, and ought to be deduc'd; otherwise we must maintain, that Conclusions may be drawn without the Use of Premises. And, in the next Place, that the Connection between these Principles and Precepts is so exceedingly clear, that every Person concern'd may immediately and distinctly discern it in every Instance. On any other Foot, these suppos'd Principles are, with respect to such a Man, no Moral Principles at all; and the Precepts which he lays down for himself, can have no sufficient Force with him, as not being built on any appearing Fitness of the Thing. These Questions therefore arise, Whether a Person of such a suppos'd mean Capacity, may gain a full View of all the several Moral Principles? and, if he may do this, and actually hath done it, Whether he must necessarily be capable of deducing from them all those Moral Conclusions, which may in just Reasoning follow?

The Principles of Moral Science are none other than the Natures of Things, and the several Relations which subsist between them.

them. Now these are so far from being apparent to every Man, even to those of the meanest Capacities, that I have distinctly shewn under my First Chapter, they are perfectly discoverable by no Man, in the mere Use of Natural Reason. In reference to God, tho' Something may be known, yet it must be confess'd that many Things are secret to us: In reference to ourselves, How many Difficulties may be started even about our own Persons, of which we can give no tolerable Solutions? And if we are so much Strangers to our own personal Condition, How much less can we determine with Certainty as to Things which relate to others? Little do we know concerning the Nature and Powers of visible Beings; and still much less concerning these which are invisible. Now if the Nature, State, and Condition of Things be, in several respects, undiscoverable by us, it is certain that the several Relations which subsist between them must be so likewise. We know God as our Creator and Preserver; but then, there may be several other Relations which he sustains, to us utterly unknown. We are related to other Men as Fellow Creatures of the same Kind: This general Relation we know perfectly: But do we know as perfectly all the other Respects we may have to one another? We may presume, upon strong Reasons, that Men are not the only intelligent creatures in the

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the Universe: But can we say how the Affairs of these intelligent Beings are intermix'd with ours? How far we are mutually depended on one another; and consequently, capable either of forwarding or obstructing our several Interests? We know something of Natural Beings: But are we such compleat Philosophers, as to be intimately acquainted with all their several Powers? And yet, without knowing these, How can we say what is fit to be done or avoided on every Occasion?

Our Author himself builds his Scheme of Duties on the Natures and Relations of Things. In proportion therefore as these several Natures and Relations are undiscoverable by us, so far must our several Schemes of Duty be defective; or, to speak more properly, so far must we fall short in our Description of the proper Rule of Conduct. And if the wisest, and most inquisitive, must frequently be at a Loss, can the meanest gain a perfect Knowledge of these Things? Can the uneducated and illiterate so far exceed the Philosophical Enquirer; and Men of no Parts go so much beyond the greatest and most extensive Genius? At this Rate, Folly can teach us more than Wisdom. — But I forbear, in a case so exceedingly plain, that nothing more is requisite either to illustrate or confirm it.

After all, let us suppose that the several Principles of Moral Science were thoroughly knowable; Will it follow from hence, that all the several Conclusions deducible from them are equally knowable? Doth the like appear in any other Art or Science? Are we to learn, that Truth is almost infinite, whilst the original Principles from which it is deducible, are in many cases few and plain? Are Men therefore able to reach all these Truths; to trace them in all their several Steps; and to make out every Thing which is, in itself capable of being prov'd?

Let us only consider how few and simple the first Principles of Geometry are. These may be known easily by a Person of tolerable Parts and Capacity. But doth it follow, that he is equally capable of mastering the whole Science, and of making out all the several Conclusions of a *Newton*, or a *Halley*? No certainly; and therefore a Distinction ought to be made between the Capacity of apprehending Principles, and of drawing Conclusions. The Ground and Reason of this is plain enough. In order to make out a Conclusion, especially when it is remote from its first and original Principle, Men ought to have a Sagacity in discerning the several Relations between Ideas, — a Fix- edness and Attention of Mind, that none of these Relations may escape without sufficient

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Observation, — Patience and Resolution to bear the Fatigues of a painful and laborious Search ; To which may be added, Opportunity and Freedom from such other Engagements as may either embarrass them in the Enquiry, or oblige them to break off too soon. But are all these the Portion of every Man ? Is every Man sagacious, attentive, patient, at leisure ? Whence then comes it to pass that there is really so great a Difference between the intellectual Attainments of Men ? Were every Thing so easy, and attainable in this respect, surely Men could not fall so very short of one another : The mere Pleasure of mastering a Truth would move them, if there were not something of superior Difficulty in the Way.

All this will, perhaps, be allow'd by our Author in reference to what he may call Speculative Science : But he will tell us, that the Case is different with regard to Practical : There every Thing is, and must be easy, and obvious to every Enquirer. But let me ask this Gentleman, Is not Reasoning as necessary to deduce practical Conclusions from practical Principles, as speculative Conclusions from speculative Principles ? Doth not Reasoning, as well in the one Case as the other, imply a Perception of the Connection or Disagreement of Ideas in the several Steps of the Argument ? Doth not this in like manner suppose, that the before-mention'd



Qualifications are equally necessary in both Cases? And if this be true, must there not be Difficulties arising in both?

To make this more apparent, let us only consider That Scheme of Morality, which this Author himself hath given us; Let us see, whether He, with all the Advantages he enjoys of Learning, Parts, Conversation, Leisure, Books, and the like, hath hit matters off so nicely; or, if he shall be suppos'd to have done so, Whether the same might as well have been done by the Illiterate, or the Dull, or the Solitary, or the Buify. If it could not, then I conceive this Point must be yielded me; and the Gentleman I am contending with must allow, that a proper Rule of Life, however discoverable by him, is not so perfectly discoverable by every one.

His Scheme of Natural Religion, is This:  
 " 'Tis evident by the Light of Nature that  
 " there is a God; or, in other Words, a  
 " Being absolutely perfect, and infinitely  
 " happy in himself, who is the Source of  
 " all other Beings. " In the next place,  
 " The Creatures can neither add to, nor  
 " take from the Happiness of that Being;  
 " and he could have no Motive in framing  
 " his Creatures, or, in giving Laws to such  
 " of them, as he made capable of knowing  
 " his Will, but their own Good. " From  
 hence he infers, " That Nothing can be a  
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“ Part of the Divine Law, but what tends  
“ to promote the common Interest of his  
“ Rational Creatures; and every Thing  
“ which does so, must be a Part of it.” In  
like manner, “ He who cannot envy us any  
“ Happiness our Nature is capable of, can  
“ forbid us those Things only, which tend  
“ to our Hurt.” These are the general  
Principles on which he builds. To which  
he adds this farther Remark, “ Our Reason,  
“ which gives us a Demonstration of the Divine  
“ Perfections, affords the same concerning the  
“ Nature of those Duties God requires; not  
“ only with relation to himself, but to our-  
“ selves, and one another: Those we shall dis-  
“ cern, if we look into ourselves, and consider  
“ our own Natures, and those Circumstances  
“ God hath plac'd us in with relation to our  
“ Fellow-Creatures, and see what conduces  
“ to our mutual Happiness: Of this our  
“ Senses, the Experience of others, as well  
“ as our own, can't fail to give us sufficient  
“ Information.”

He had just before mention'd the Three  
common Heads of Duty, *viz.* those which  
relate to God, to ourselves, and to one ano-  
ther. He now proceeds to give us a more  
distinct Account What those several Duties  
are. “ With relation to ourselves, he tells  
“ us, Forasmuch as God hath endow'd Man  
“ with such a Nature as makes him neces-  
“ sarily desire his own Good, — therefore  
“ he

" He cannot require any thing of him in  
 " prejudice of it; but, on the contrary,  
 " that he should do every thing which tends  
 " to promote the Good of it. — In con-  
 " sequence of this, That we should avoid  
 " all irregular Passions, all unfriendly Af-  
 " fections, all Excess of sensual Delights,  
 " with all immoderate Desires." And then  
 he sums up all in these Words, " Whoso-  
 " ever so regulates his Natural Appetites as  
 " will conduce most to the Exercise of his  
 " Reason, the Health of his Body, and the  
 " Pleasure of his Senses, taken and con-  
 " sider'd together, may be certain he can  
 " never offend his Maker.

" As to what God expects from Man with  
 " relation to each other, every one, he af-  
 " firms, must know his Duty, who consi-  
 " ders that the common Parent of Mankind  
 " has the whole Species alike under his Pro-  
 " tection; and will equally punish him for  
 " injuring others, as he would others for  
 " injuring him; and consequently, that it is  
 " his Duty to deal with them as he expects  
 " they should deal with him in like Cir-  
 " cumstances. — That Human Nature is  
 " so constituted, that Men cannot live with-  
 " out Society and mutual Assistance; and  
 " that God hath endow'd them with Rea-  
 " son, Speech, and other Faculties, evi-  
 " dently fitted to enable them to assist each  
 " other in Matters of Life; That therefore

" 'tis



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" 'tis the Will of God, who gives them this  
" Nature, and endows them with these Fa-  
" culties, that they should employ them  
" for the common Benefit, and mutual  
" Assistance. — That therefore every Man,  
" for the sake of others as well as himself,  
" is not to disable his Body or Mind by such  
" Irregularities, as may make him less ser-  
" viceable to them. — In short, we cannot  
" but know, if we in the least consider,  
" that whatever Circumstances Men are  
" plac'd in by the Universal Cause of all  
" Things, that 'tis his eternal and immuta-  
" ble Will, by his placing them in these  
" Circumstances, that they act as these re-  
" quire. — This Consideration alone will  
" direct a Man how to act in all Conditions  
" of Life, whether Father, Son, Husband,  
" Servant, Master, King, &c."

This is our Author's Sum of Morality or  
Natural Religion, taken from the Second  
Chapter of his Book; the Title prefix'd to  
which is This; " That the Religion of Na-  
" ture consists in observing those Things,  
" which our Reason, by considering the  
" Nature of God and Man, and the Rela-  
" tion we stand in to him, and one another,  
" demonstrates to be our Duty; and that  
" those Things are plain; and likewise,  
" What they are." Whether this be a just  
and perfect Account of Natural Religion,  
shall be consider'd immediately: But, if it  
were

were allow'd to be such, doth our Author think that a Person of the lowest Attainments, or Abilities would, or could have drawn out the same by himself? Or, doth he indeed think, that now he hath done the Work for him, Things are made so exceedingly plain and easy, that every one must assent to his Scheme, and presently discern the true Ground and Foundation of every Duty? For mine own Part, I am so far from thinking so, that I cannot persuade myself our Author thoroughly understands himself in every Branch of it. Either his own Ideas were confus'd; or else, he hath endeavour'd to impose upon his Readers by a studied Confusion in his Expressions. This I shall support by offering some Remarks on the Scheme itself.

Our Author, before he proceeds to a distinct Account of the several Duties incumbent on us, offers some previous Reflections necessary for the right understanding the general Nature of these Duties. To this purpose he observes, "That as the Creature  
" can neither add to, nor take from the  
" Happiness of the Creator, so he could  
" have no Motive in framing his Creatures;  
" or in giving Laws to such of them as he  
" made capable of knowing his Will, but  
" their own Good." Here I would desire to know, whether by *their own Good* our Author means the particular and personal  
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Good of each Creature on whom such Laws are impos'd ; or else, the Good of some or other of his Creatures. If he means the former, the Principle is entirely false, and will prove the Foundation of such a Scheme of Morality as is monstrous. For, upon this Foot, we are concern'd to perform no Actions whatsoever with regard to another, which do not of themselves, and directly tend to produce some Good to ourselves.

X What, in this Case, will become of Benevolence, Love of the Publick, and the like? But if he means the latter, we may allow it to be in some respects true. However, I conceive, he should have express'd himself more distinctly ; especially when he was setting forth a Scheme, which he intended as a perfect Model, and which was to shew us how plain and easy every Thing in Morality might be made.

*I should think the Deane had never perceived the pleasure of Benevolence in his own mind*

Again, " Nothing can be a Part of the " Divine Law, but what tends to promote " the common Interest of his rational Creatures. " Here the Gentleman seems to carry Matters into another Extream. Before he had asserted, that the only End of the Creator in giving Laws to his Creatures, was their own Good ; Now he asserts, that Nothing can be a Part of the Divine Law, but what tends to promote the common Interest. The Truth really lies between both Assertions, when they are rightly understood : Every Thing



Thing is a Part of the Divine Law, by which our own Good may be promoted consistently with the Publick, or by which the Publick Good may be promoted consistently with our own; and we shall run ourselves into the most extravagant Errors, if we propose either of these in Exclusion of the other. For, tho' in certain Cases a Man may be oblig'd to forego his own private and personal Good, in order to promote the Interest of the Publick, yet this can be built on none other Foundation, than that a gracious God will make us Amends hereafter; and so, upon the whole, the publick and the private Interest will be entirely reconcil'd, and made consistent with each other.

To go on; Our Author affirms, "He who cannot envy us any Happiness our Nature is capable of, can forbid us those Things only which tend to our Hurt." This is a Proposition, which however it might be allow'd as standing by itself, yet hath no manner of Dependence on that Point which is here assign'd as the Principle from which it flows. For, "God cannot envy us any Happiness our Nature is capable of." What then? The natural Inference is This; He cannot forbid us any Thing which tends to our Happiness, — Not, "that he cannot forbid us any Thing, but what tends to our Hurt." However, tho'

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tho' the Inference be wrong, the Proposition may in some sort be admitted: Only we must understand it with this Restriction, the Hurt of ourselves, or of any other Being; and consider the Proposition, even thus understood, with a View, not to the Prohibitions of Reveal'd Religion, but merely of Natural.

He observes afterwards, "Our Senses, and the Experience of others, as well as our own, can't fail to give us sufficient Information" — of what? Why, "of that which conduces to our mutual Happiness." Sense and Experience may indeed do something here, but not quite so much as this Gentleman pretends. Reason should be allow'd its proper Share in determining this Matter; otherwise we shall not make a sufficient Difference between Men and Brutes. And yet after we have taken all these together, I question whether many Things will not be overlook'd, which are really conducive to our Happiness. The Effects indeed we may feel sensibly; but how far Experience, or that Portion of Reason which we enjoy, may be able to trace them up to their original Causes, is another Point; and I am apt to think there would not be so much Unhappiness in the World, if we could so easily discern the Remedy. But if this be true, then as a perfect Direction cannot be had this way,  
we

we may hope for something of that Kind in another. Yet thus much we allow readily, That our Scheme of Natural Law must be influenc'd by this Principle, and, so far as this, would have been rightly propos'd by our Author, had it been as perfectly represented.

With regard to the Duties to ourselves, this Author informs us, "Whosoever so regulates his natural Appetites, as will conduce most to the Exercise of his Reason, the Health of his Body, and the Pleasure of his Senses, taken and consider'd together, may be certain he can never offend his Maker." This Passage is express'd so obscurely, that I cannot be certain how far I understand it in our Author's Sense. Perhaps it may not be very plain What the Gentleman here means by "Natural Appetites." One might be tempted to think, that he intends by this Expression, *Sensual Appetites*; For, since these only have a Relation to the Pleasure of the Senses, which is particularly mention'd in the Close of the Sentence, the Natural Appetites before mention'd in the Beginning of it, should, one might think, signify the same. I am the more inclin'd to this, from another Passage in the very same Paragraph; "The Health of the Body, says he, and the Vigour of the Mind, being highly conducing to our  
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“ Good, we must be sensible we offend our  
 “ Maker, if we indulge our *Senses* to the  
 “ Prejudice of These.”

As uncertain am I, what our Author means  
 by the Term “ conduce; ” This Word, un-  
 derstood in its proper Sense, implies some  
 Efficiency, some direct Contribution of a  
 proper Cause to the Production of its Effect.  
 But, in this Sense, the Government of our  
 Appetites cannot be said to *conduce* either to  
 the Exercise of our Reason, or the Health  
 of our Body. The Regulating our Passions,  
 &c. doth indeed remove an Hindrance of  
 the Effects before mention'd, but it doth not  
 directly produce them. I should be apt  
 therefore to suspect, that he really intends  
 thus much; Whosoever so regulates his na-  
 tural Appetites, as shall be *most consistent with*  
 the Exercise of his Reason, &c. cannot of-  
 fend his Maker.

A Question likewise may arise, What he  
 means by “ The Exercise of Reason. ” Is  
 it only the internal Exercise of the Faculty?  
 or, Does he intend likewise, the Influence of  
 that Exercise on our Conduct and Behaviour?  
 I should be apt to think that our Author in-  
 tends it in the latter Sense, from considering  
 a Passage in his 22d p. where he tells us,  
 “ The Happiness of all Beings whatsoever  
 “ consists in the Perfection of their Nature:  
 “ And the Nature of a Rational Being is  
 “ most perfect, when it is perfectly Rational,

"i.e. when it governs all its actions by the Rules of right Reason." If this be what he means, the whole Amount of the Reflexion given us above, is This; He who governs his natural Appetites so, as to act consistently with the Rules of right Reason, &c. may be sure he cannot offend his Maker. Upon this View of the Expression, there was no manner of Occasion to mention any Thing about Health or Pleasure; for, the Rules of right Reason had already taken in every Thing of that Kind. But, if our Author really intends no more than the internal Exercise of the reasoning Faculty, then I conceive there may be several other Objections made to the Truth and Usefulness of the Reflexion, which shall be noted immediately.

Again; our Author observes, "Whoever so regulates his natural Appetites, &c. may be certain he can never offend his Maker." But what hath this Reflexion to do here, where it was his Business to tell us Not merely what is lawful, but, what we are bound to in Point of Duty? Or, if he shall affirm, that This is really what he intends by the Expression, (as perhaps he may,) besides that this is an unaccountable Abuse of Language, I must observe, that some great Difficulties will arise about the Truth and Propriety of his Reflexion consider'd in this Light. For upon this Foot,

it will be the Duty of every Man to indulge his Appetites in all those Instances, which conduce to the Pleasure of the Senses, if they be only consistent with the Exercise of Reason, and the Health of the Body. This is a new Duty indeed, and undiscover'd by all who have gone before this Gentleman in moral Enquiries. These have contented themselves with barely asserting the Lawfulness of gratifying our sensual Appetites on certain Occasions; but no One hath ever carry'd the Matter so far, as to insist on it as a Point of Duty. In the next Place, it is insisting on a Matter as strictly obligatory in so loose a manner, as must run us into numberless Irregularities of a monstrous Nature. It is our Duty, it seems, to indulge our Senses: — But, how far? Why, so far, as is consistent with the Exercise of Reason, and the Health of the Body. This indeed may guard Men against Excesses in Degree, but not at all against those Enjoyments which are irregular as to Kind. If such do not impair the Reason, nor destroy the Health, they are not only allowable, but our Duty. The most monstrous Practices may be justified on this Principle.

The next General Head comprehends those Offices which are due to others. Here he tells us, that 'tis our Duty, in the First Place, "Not to injure others;" and in the next, "To



“ employ the several Faculties we have for the  
“ common Benefit. ” All this is most certainly  
true ; and yet I cannot but object somewhat  
against our Author’s Management : For, how  
doth he make out these two Conclusions? Why,  
He deduces them from this single Principle,  
*viz.* That all Mankind are alike under the  
*Protection* of God ; “ Every one ( says he )  
“ must know his Duty, who considers, that  
“ the common Parent of Mankind has the  
“ whole Species alike under his Protection. ”  
This is an Argument indeed why One Man  
should not injure another ; but is none at all  
why he should employ his several Faculties  
for his Service. This must be deduc’d from  
another Principle, *viz.* That God wills not  
only the common Safety, but the common  
Happiness ; which Happiness cannot be  
promoted without the mutual Intercourse of  
kind offices.

However, let us suppose our Gentleman  
to have been entirely right in his arguing ;  
and that all the several Offices due from one  
man to another, are reducible to these Two  
Points : still it may not appear so plainly,  
what Kind of Actions may, on certain Occa-  
sions, be serviceable, or prejudicial to others.  
Hath this Gentleman pretended to point out  
all these ? So far from it, that he hath not  
so much as hinted at several of the most  
important : And when he comes to speak  
of the Relative Duties, we have Nothing  
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more than This ; “ We cannot but know,  
 “ if we in the least consider, that what-  
 “ ever Circumstances Men are plac'd in  
 “ by The Universal Cause of all Things, it  
 “ is his eternal and immutable Will, by pla-  
 “ cing them in these Circumstances, that they  
 “ act as these require. This Consideration  
 “ alone will direct a Man, How to act in  
 “ all Conditions of Life, whether, Father,  
 “ Son, Husband, Servant, Master, King, &c.”  
 Now, if this be really enough, The Gen-  
 tleman might have spar'd all his Pains in  
 drawing out a Moral Scheme ; and have  
 told us, That our Duty implied every Thing,  
 which the Circumstances we are placed in  
 require. This might have been allow'd him  
 as true, when rightly understood : But then  
 it could serve to very little Purpose, unless  
 he could shew us distinctly, What these Cir-  
 cumstances do require. And if this would  
 really have been a very useless Account of  
 Morality in the General, I conceive it will  
 be as little serviceable, when us'd to set forth  
 to us those particular Duties, which ought to  
 have been describ'd distinctly.

I shall add one Observation more on his  
 Scheme, *viz.* That notwithstanding this  
 Gentleman had reduc'd our several Duties to  
 these Three Heads, *viz.* Things which re-  
 late to God, our Neighbour, and ourselves,  
 yet the Duties to God are in a manner neg-  
 lected. This is the more remarkable, be-  
 cause

cause he proposes to lay before us a perfect Scheme of Duty ; in which, as the Duties to God are the principal, and apt to have the greatest Influence on all the rest, so one might expect that these should have been trac'd with particular Care, and set forth with all the Advantages they deserve. What he hath just hinted in relation to these, he pretends to build on God's infinite Happiness, Goodness, Wisdom, and Power : " From the Consideration of which Perfections, he tells us, p. 15. we cannot but have the greatest Veneration, nay the greatest Adoration and Love for The Supreme Being ; who, that we may not fail to be as happy as possible for such Creatures to be, has made our acting for our *present*, to be the only Means of obtaining our *future* Happiness. " It appears from hence, That the Consideration of the Divine Perfections mention'd before, is carry'd no farther than the Manifestations we have of them in the Laws which God gives us ! And consequently, he builds all the Duties we owe to God, merely on the Equity and Tenderness of his Laws ; whereas I should be apt to think, that Duty in general was owing to him, antecedently to the Consideration of any particular Laws, and founded in that Right which The Supreme Being hath to give us Laws. But not to insist on the general Duty we owe to God, it may be observ'd,

observ'd, that in his Definition of Natural Religion, he tells us, it signifies "The Sense, &c. of those Duties which result from the Knowledge we have of God, and his Perfections, &c." — Of God, and his Perfections? — but how? — consider'd in one View only? no, certainly; but taken in every View in which they may be consider'd by us. On any other Foot than this, as we should build our Duty on too weak a Foundation, so should we give it too little an Extent. And what, after all, are the Duties which he inculcates? Why, Veneration, and Love; to which he afterwards adds "Gratitude, and a striving to imitate him in our extensive Love to our Fellow Creatures." Honour, Love, and Gratitude, are indeed Branches of the Duty we owe to God, however lamely they have been made out by this Gentleman: But then, are there none other Duties beside these, which it became him to take Notice of, in a Scheme which was to represent to us, How far Natural Reason can carry us on this Subject, and to supersede every Thing which Revelation can offer?

I will not say that this important Part of Natural Religion was slighted with Design; tho' one might be tempted to think so, by this Passage at the Close of his Second Chapter: "We may define True Religion to consist in a constant Disposition of Mind to do



" all the Good we can, and thereby to render  
 " ourselves acceptable to God, by answering  
 " the End of his Creation. " To do all the  
 Good we can; is, it seems, the Sum of Religion: But then, To whom are we to do Good? That he tells us elsewhere: Sometimes, he affirms, we are to act for our own Good only; Sometimes, for the common Good only. If either of these Senses be what he intends here, he must exclude all those Duties which we owe to God; For, I suppose it will hardly be allow'd, that an Endeavour to render ourselves acceptable to God merely by doing Good to ourselves or other Men, is, properly speaking, any Instance of Duty to God at all.

Several other Reflexions might have been offer'd on this Gentleman's Scheme of Natural Religion: But these are sufficient for my present Purpose, *viz.* To shew, that in his Expressions, he is perplex'd, obscure and doubtful; in his Arguings, weak and inconclusive; and in the Scheme itself, consider'd only as a System of Precepts, miserably defective. And yet this Gentleman had not only his own good Sense to direct him, the Learning of all those worthy Enquirers into moral Matters, who have gone before him, for his Assistance, but likewise the Advantage of the Christian Revelation, if he had not thought himself above taking any Advantages from consulting it; From which,

however,

however, some Benefit he hath received, no doubt, by those Impressions which were once made on him, and which he hath not been able to efface entirely. But if This very Gentleman, under all these favourable Circumstances, and whilst he pretended to give us a perfect Scheme, (which Design he executed, without question, as well as he could) hath yet fail'd so grossly, What might we expect from those, whom he terms Persons of the meanest Capacity? — Persons less capable either of making out the several Principles of moral Science, or of drawing them forth into those Practical Conclusions, which do truly, and in just Reasoning follow from them? — I shall add nothing more to the direct Proof of this Point, but pass on,

2. To support it, by examining what This Writer hath advanc'd to the contrary. I shall not trouble myself with confident Affirmations, where no Reason is alledg'd in Proof of them, but only with such as he hath pretended to support with some Shew of Arguing. Something to this purpose we meet with p. 26. where our Author argues from the End for which Human Reason was given us, *viz.* To compare Things, and to judge concerning the Fitness or Unfitness of Actions; From whence he concludes thus: " Could not our Reason judge soundly in  
" all such Matters, it could not answer the  
" End for which God bestowed it on us. "

But

But this I have already consider'd in my First Chapter, p. 37. I shall therefore pass on to some other Matters which may deserve Examination, and of which no Notice hath been taken hitherto. And,

1. It is alledg'd, "That were we not capable by our Reason of distinguishing Good from Evil, or knowing from the Consideration of the invariable Perfections of God, what the Divine Goodness could command, or forbid his Creatures, antecedently to any external Revelation, we could not distinguish the true instituted Religion from the many false ones." p. 66.

It is here allow'd freely, that every Man, *i. e.* every Moral Agent, is capable, in some Sense, of distinguishing Good from Evil; For, if he were absolutely incapable of this, he would cease to be a Moral Agent at all. But the proper Question is here perplex'd, and misrepresented by our Author. We are not enquiring, Whether Men are capable of doing this in *any* Instances, but whether they are capable of doing it in *all* Instances.

Besides, The Gentleman hath express'd himself somewhat unfortunately in These Terms, "distinguishing Good from Evil." I suppose he means; the discovering that to be Good, which really is Good, and that to be Evil, which really is Evil. If this be his Sense, I must observe, that a Man might be incapable of doing this in many Cases, in which



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which he should by no means confound Good with Evil. For, there is plainly a Medium between Good and Evil, viz. Indifferent; and, the Errors into which Men are most apt to be betray'd, consist in the confounding one or other of these Extremes with the Middle.

But, not to criticize on Words, I will take the Objection thus, (as it must be taken if he intends it as any Objection at all,) "Unless Men are capable, by their Reason, of discovering every thing which is fit and proper on the one Hand, or unfit and improper on the other, and this antecedently to any external Revelation, they will be incapable of Judging concerning the Revelation itself, and of distinguishing the true instituted Religion from the many false ones."

The Insufficiency of what is here alledg'd will appear by a parallel Instance. Suppose a Question should arise, Whether every Man be capable of mastering the several Arts and Sciences without a Teacher? and it were alledg'd, That every one must be capable of this, or else he would be unable to judge Whether his Master should teach him right or wrong; and consequently, that such Teaching could be of no Service to him; Would such Arguing as this, I pray, be admitted? No, certainly: And that for this Reason, viz. That Things which might not be known, or perhaps knowable without

Teaching,

*approbation of em that makes em such, and before it is not necessary that any one should be capable of mastering em without a teacher in order to judge whether his Master*



in *Truths of a moral character if there*  
Was not 268 A DEFENCE of

*in Mankind* Teaching, may yet immediately approve  
*antecedently* themselves to the Mind when taught: In  
*to Revelation* like manner, Things which could not be dis-  
*a percep-* covered without a Revelation, may yet upon  
*tion or* that Revelation appear so plainly agreeable  
*knowledge* with Reason, that a Man may not entertain  
*of their* the least Doubt whether they are capable  
*fitness* of being true or no. In such a Case, where  
*agreement* nothing can be concluded from the Nature  
*with the* of the Thing, the External Evidence of the  
*character* Revelation must take Place; and if Men will  
*of a* carefully attend to this, there can be no Room  
*Reveler* for Error.

*how could* Besides, suppose I should admit that the  
*Mankind* Generality of Mankind want either the Capa-  
*also from* city or Leisure to try a Revelation thorough-  
*What kind* ly by its internal Characters, and to judge  
*of Facts* concerning every Part of it by the Rule of  
*they cause* Fit, and Unfit; What then? Is there no  
*the deau* Criterion whereby to distinguish the true in-  
*not in* stituted Religion from the many false ones?  
*is a* I think there is; and that many, and incont-  
*as an* estable Miracles will serve the Purpose; con-  
*little* cerning the Evidence of which, consider'd  
*mon, but* as Facts, Men are much more capable of  
*what con-* judging, than they are concerning tedious and  
*rection is* abstract Reasonings.

*are only an* And tho' it hath been alledg'd by this Au-  
*and Truth* thor, that Miracles are no Proof, because  
*when Malignant* these are capable of being wrought by Evil  
*Beings are* Spirits to confirm an Imposture; yet he must  
*allowed to* allow, if he considers that these Evil Spirits  
*Wrought* are only an Instance (of *which* are  
*also that* when Malignant Beings are allowed to be  
*supernatural* wrought, and also that a Supreme  
*Being has* Being has by them *been* attested to

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positive Institutions might come from  
him: and I think I may well rest the  
REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 269 *Matter*

are subject to their Creator; he must, I say, *on this*  
allow, that no natural Powers they enjoy can *point of*  
be exercised without God's Permission. And *things*  
when he reflects that God is Wise and Good, *positive*  
he must allow likewise, that He will not per- *attested by*  
mit them to use this Seal of his Authority to *miracles*  
confirm an Imposture; at least in those In- *ask the*  
stances, where Men are incapable of guard- *dear for*  
ing against the Delusion. On this Foot we *mankind*  
may secure ourselves against all Difficulties *shall know*  
arising from this Argument. For if Men are *from what*  
capable of judging concerning miraculous *Being such*  
Facts; and if God will not permit those to *things so*  
be wrought in Confirmation of an Impo- *attested*  
sture, where Men are of themselves incom- *proceed*  
petent Judges of the Doctrines taught, — *since as*  
then there is none Occasion, in order to *its allowed*  
secure themselves from Delusion, that they *evil spirit*  
should have a full View of these Things an- *can work*  
tecedently to a Revelation. The Wisdom *miracles*  
and Goodness of God are a sufficient Security, *have so*  
notwithstanding the Imperfection and Weak- *done it*  
ness of Man. *naturally*

2. A Second Objection to the same Pur-  
pose is drawn from the Universality of the  
Divine Government; and consequently, the  
Universality of God's Laws. It occurs p.  
197. and is thus represented by our Author;  
“When God acts as Governor of the Uni-  
“verse, his Laws are alike design'd for all  
“under his Government, i. e. all Mankind;  
“and follows

*They might be supposed to do so in at-  
tention of capricious & arbitrary  
Injunctions; unless y<sup>e</sup> dear will say  
were allowed to work miracles but to no  
end or design at all*

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"and consequently, what equally concerns all, must be equally knowable by all."

Laws which concern all Men, *i. e.* by which all Men are oblig'd, must be capable of being known by all Men. This is certain; because no one can be oblig'd to that, which he is incapable of knowing. So far as this I must allow what our Author contends for, with this Reserve only, tho' such Laws may be knowable by all, yet they may not be *equally* knowable, if by *equally* he means, in the same Degrees of Clearness and Perfection. But then I must observe, that this doth by no means come up to the present Purpose. The Question at present is, Not whether every Man is capable of knowing every Thing which is properly to him a Law; but, Whether every Man can, in virtue of his natural Reason, discover all the Fitneses of Things; and consequently, all that is suppos'd capable of becoming a Law by being known. These are quite different Things, and therefore ought not to be confounded. And, if he shall tell us, (as the Argument now under Examination requires he should), that forasmuch as all Men are equally under God's Government, they must have the very same Laws given them; and if the same Laws are given to all, they must be equally knowable by all; — I must deny the In-

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man ought to be able to discover all the Fitneses of Things, whereas no other is necessary than that he should be able to know what is the Fitness of things come in his way

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# REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 271

ference, and maintain, that the Universality of Government doth by no means prove the Identity and Universality of all God's Laws with regard to his Creatures. \* This is apparent even in Civil Constitutions, in which the same Supreme Magistrate doth by no means govern all his Subjects by the very same Laws, but by such different Rules as are adapted to their several different Circumstances. Thus likewise The Supreme Being, tho', as Governor of the Universe, He be Lord as well of the Irrational as the Rational Part of the Creation, yet He still governs them by different Measures; the One by Instinct, the Other by the Rules of Reason. But whence comes this to pass? From hence certainly, that the One not having such a Measure of Capacity as to be able to form to themselves a Moral Rule, and to consider it as The Divine Will, cannot direct their Actions by such a Rule: For the same Cause must we assert, that since Reasonable Beings are to govern themselves by the Rules of Reason, it must be in Proportion to the Degrees of Reason they enjoy, and the Opportunities they have of using it: For, as to any Rules of Fitness by them undiscoverable, however evident they may be to other Beings of superior Capacities, they are upon the very same Foot with Brutes themselves, and must be exempted from all

Obligation

Law makers, and betwixt Whom & their Subjects & Relation is often various in their several Circumstances, whereas betwixt God & his Creatures it is invariably the same

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Obligation to them as the Brutes themselves are.

X The Difference therefore between this Gentleman and myself on the present Argument, is This; I maintain that the Rules of Fitness are just so far universal Laws, as they are universally knowable; and consequently, if they are not universally knowable, they are not universal Laws: He, on the other Hand, supposes, without any sufficient Proof, that these are universal Laws; and from such a suppos'd Universality of the Laws, concludes, that they must be universally knowable. I shall only add, that this is a Begging the Question, and a Taking that for granted, which he is concern'd to prove.

3. The third Argument by which he endeavours to evince this Point, That a proper Rule of Life is perfectly knowable by Men of the meanest Capacity, amounts to this; That the meaner Peoples Circumstances are, the fewer are the Particulars they are concern'd in; and consequently, tho' they should be suppos'd to fall short of others in Point of Knowledge, yet they may be perfectly acquainted with all those Things in which they have any manner of Concern. We meet with it in the 281st p. where our Author thus expresses himself, "The meaner People are, and the lower their Station, the fewer are the Things their Duty

*The Fitness of Things has Relation to y<sup>e</sup> particular Circumstances of every Person & in that Sense*

*it is justly universal: & altho' this abstract Fitness w<sup>ch</sup> the Deas<sup>r</sup> so*

*talks of, he well knows exists nowhere; & is only made use of to serve his purpose*

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"Duty consists in; and those so very plain,  
"that they cannot well mistake with Rela-  
"tion either to God or Man, were they not  
"impos'd on by artful Men."

What are the Matters in which their  
Duty, properly speaking, consists, i.e. which  
they are strictly oblig'd to, is, as hath been  
said above, beside the present Question;  
since we are now enquiring Not about The  
Law which makes Duty, but that proper  
Rule of Life which is built on Fitness.

Thus much, however, must be allow'd this  
Gentleman, that the meaner Men are, the  
fewer will those Things be which are fit and  
proper for them to do; because, by this  
means, they will sustain fewer Relations,  
and consequently, have less to act in Life.

But what, I pray, can be concluded from  
this? That these Persons must therefore be  
capable of discovering for themselves every  
Thing which is fit and proper for them to  
do? Will this, I say, follow? or is there  
the least Colour for making this Conclusion?

Let me observe, that all the several Fitnesses  
which result from the Considerations of  
Creator and Creature; of the Relations which  
subsist between Intelligent Beings as such;  
and of those likewise which are built on the  
Consideration of Man as a Rational Animal,  
are the same with respect to Persons in the  
meanest Condition of Life, as to those in  
the highest. In this regard there is no Dif-

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ference between Men, under whatever Variety of Circumstances they live. But are all these so perfectly discoverable by Men in the lowest Condition?

Besides, the Gentleman hath us'd somewhat of unbecoming Art in wording his Argument. He tells us, "The meaner People are, and the lower their Station, the fewer are the Things their Duty consists in." But the Question doth not relate merely to the Meanness of their Circumstances, but the Meanness of their Capacity. "Religion," says he p. 197, "which way soever reveal'd, carries such internal Marks of Truth, as at all Times and Places shews itself even to the meanest Capacity, &c." So again p. 284. He declares, "That it makes most for the Honour of God, and Good of Men, to suppose, that all God's Laws should carry with them such evident Marks of Goodness and Kindness for the whole Race of Mankind; that Men of the meanest Capacities, even tho' they can't read their native Language, may know their Duty." 'Tis the Capacity which is the principal Thing to be consider'd in this Question: And therefore, tho' it should be suppos'd, that the bare Meanness of Condition should not prevent their discovering every Thing which is fit and proper; yet, I hope, the Meanness of Mens Capacities might. This I do, and cannot

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cannot but maintain. This I have endeavour'd to evince, as well from common Experience, as the Reason and Nature of the Thing itself: On the other Hand, This Gentleman confidently espouses the other Side of the Question: Is frequent in his Affirmations, and thinks that these must pass for Proofs; for, as to any Thing of real Argument, he is entirely deficient; and, if he ever aims at any thing that Way, all the Shew that it even seems to have at first Sight, is owing to Nothing more than this, that his Expressions are equivocal, and the Point he speaks to mis-stated by him. Fit Methods to be us'd in so bad a Cause!

So much having been offer'd on the First Question, which I propos'd in the Beginning of this Chapter, I shall be very brief on the Second; because, if a proper Rule of Life be not perfectly discoverable by Men of the meanest Capacity, it will follow *a fortiori*, that it cannot be easily discoverable. Yet something to this Purpose may be necessary on another Account. For, upon Supposition that I should grant all our Author contends for on the former Question, yet I might still dispute this Point with him, and be able to maintain the Expediency of a Revelation, in order to make the proper Rule of Life more easily discoverable by Persons of mean Capacity, than it could

have been from the mere Workings of their Minds.

Let us then suppose that all Things fit and proper to be done are simply discoverable by all; Doth it follow from hence that it must be easily discoverable? Is every Thing easily to be done, which is possible to be done? No certainly: And therefore we must try, whether it will appear from other Considerations, that this is so very easy a Matter as this Author contends it is; in doing which, I shall proceed, as I did before, and argue as well from the Experience of Mankind, as the Nature of the Thing.

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 all this here  
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 ther Systems of Morality; Might not  
 one as well say that because no one can  
 seriatim make a Repetition of all the  
 Words in his vernacular Language that  
 therefore his Speech is imperfect

Now, the very Wisest and Greatest Men have not found it so easy a Matter to trace out all Things of a Moral Concern. The Philosophers have busy'd themselves this Way, and found full Employment for their Minds; and after all, have been so far from discovering every Thing they enquir'd after, that succeeding Writers have frequently added to the Discoveries of their Predecessors. Be it therefore, that those who err'd did not err unavoidably; I yet still I must affirm, that the Consideration of these Errors sufficiently proves, that the Truths from which they err'd so often, were remote; That there were Intricacies in the several Questions before them, — Things, to them at least, difficult; and consequently, that the Subject they were upon, was not



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so very plain and easy as this Gentleman represents it.

And indeed, had Matters been so exceedingly obvious, what Occasion would there have been for taking any Pains at all? What Occasion for labouring a Point, which, it seems, "is so clearly and fully manifested in the Book of Nature, that he who runs may read it?" p. 28. What Occasion for writing Books on this Subject, and pretending to teach Mankind Matters "which shew themselves so plainly to the meanest Capacities?" On this Supposition Study were trifling; and the publishing to the World Schemes which every one knew before-hand, or might easily know without Assistance from others, must be absolutely ridiculous.

Nay, let me ask This Gentleman, Whether his own Scheme of Morality, defective as it is, cost him no Pains or Thought at all? Or, if it did not, Whether he could have drawn it out so easily, had he never accustom'd himself to close Thinking; had he not formerly examin'd certain Principles with Care, and treasur'd them up for future Use in arguing? Can this therefore be thought so very easy a Work, even to a Person of the meanest Capacity, which hath requir'd long preparatory Studies, and a settled Habit of Thinking in a Gentleman of good natural Talents? Or, will he affirm, that the Scheme which he hath now offer'd



to the World is obvious to every Understanding, and that Persons of the meanest Capacity must take it immediately, Let him try an ordinary and illiterate Person, if he pleases: And if it shall appear upon Trial, that he hath Stated (I will not say all Matters of Moral Import, for this he hath not done by any means, but) the several Particulars mention'd by him so clearly, as to be immediately understood and assented to by every one to whom they are propos'd, I will on this Condition give up the Point.

But sure I am that this is impossible: For, from the Nature of the Thing it is certain, that the more remote any Conclusions are from their original Principles, the greater Attention and Sagacity are requir'd to the making them. Now, where these are requir'd, Things cannot be obvious and easy to every one. Attention itself is painful even to the sagacious: How much more must it be so where the Want of Parts shall still increase the Difficulty! Are there no Moral Conclusions then which depend on a long Train of Reasoning? — Perhaps our Author will tell us, No: Every thing is immediately reducible to the Rule of Fitness. — Be it so: But then the next Question is, What are the Things which are fit and proper? The Answer will be, Those which are suitable to the Relations in which we stand to God and our Fellow Creatures.

Creatures. Very well; yet Two new Questions will arise, What are those Relations; and What are those Actions which are really suited to them? Both these must be settled; and each of them will still multiply themselves into a vast Variety of other Questions. For, in order to know What these several Relations are, we must know, in a good Degree, the several Natures related; and this will carry us on to some of the deepest Enquiries in Natural Philosophy, and Metaphysics. Or, supposing all these known, yet still it remains to be enquir'd, What Actions are really suited to these several Relations; to determine which we shall be oblig'd to enquire farther into the certain, the probable, and, in some Cases, the possible Consequences of our Actions: For, without knowing These, we cannot, in all Cases, determine What is fit to be done; or, if you please, What is suitable to, and expressive of the several Relations we sustain.

From this short View of Matters it will appear, (if it did not sufficiently appear before, upon the very first Reflection,) that a proper Rule of Life, however discoverable simply, yet is not easily discoverable by every one. In Truth, our Author's Assertion on this Point, is so very gross, and contrary to common Sense and Experience, that he hath not pretended to support it



by Argument. He hath, indeed, Once or Twice seem'd to intimate something this way, and but seem'd to do it. Thus, "I can't help thinking but, such is The Divine Goodness, God's Will is so clearly and fully manifested in the Book of Nature, that he who runs may read it." p. 28. And in another Place, "Let any one say, how 'tis possible God could more fully make known his Will to All intelligent Creatures, than by making every Thing within and without them a Declaration of it, and an Argument for observing it." p. 19. In the former Passage our Author seems to build his Assertion on the Consideration of The Divine Goodness. But since he hath not endeavour'd to shew, how The Divine Goodness proves his Point, the bare mention of the Divine Goodness can by no Means pass for an Argument. As to the other Passage, in which The Gentleman demands, How 'tis possible God should more fully make known his Will, than by making every Thing within and without a Declaration of it; or, as he expresses himself in another Place, "[God] cannot speak more plainly than he hath already done by the Things themselves;" p. 27. Here likewise he confidently affirms a Point without proving it. And his Confidence is the more surprizing, because he carries Matters so much farther than any one hath



hath ever pretended to carry them before him. Still, this is not all; Our Author, not content barely to assert, that God cannot make Things plainer in any other Way, than he hath done by the Nature of Things, goes on to maintain, That if a Revelation should be given us, yet it will be more difficult to understand the Proof, and to comprehend the Meaning of it, than it is to discover what is fit and proper from the Nature and Reason of Things. This is bold indeed: And if he can make this Assertion good, the Credit of Revelation must sink entirely. For That is no Revelation where Nothing is reveal'd; and Nothing can be reveal'd, if Things cannot be made more easy than they were before. A Point of this Consequence will deserve to be consider'd in a Chapter by itself.





## CHAP. VI.

*Whether a proper Rule of Life be more easily, and more perfectly discoverable by us, than the Proof or Meaning of a Revelation can be.*



BEFORE I proceed to the particular Examination of this Question, I must observe somewhat on Two or Three Distinctions, which frequently occur in this Gentleman's Performance, and which may be apt to confound and mislead his Readers, if they are not rightly understood, and carefully attended to.

He distinguishes then, between Revelation *Internal*, and *External*; *Immediate*, and *Mediate*; *Original*, and *Traditional*. By Revelation internal, immediate, and original, he means the Discovery which is made of Things in the Use of our natural Reason; and by Revelation external, mediate, and traditional, he understands what the World generally understands by the word Revelation, *i. e.* such a Disco-

a Discovery as God is pleas'd to make, or is suppos'd to make to us in an extraordinary Way. I presume, he calls it external, because it is confirm'd to us by external Signs, such as Miracles, or the like; mediate, because it is deliver'd to us by the Mediation of Prophets; and traditional, because deliver'd down from one to another successively, in the same way as other Traditions are.

But, is This such a Use of the word Revelation as can be justify'd by the common Forms of Speaking? Have the Generality of Authors distinguish'd concerning Revelation in the way he hath? Do not Writers understand by it, such a Manifestation of the Divine Will, as is made by some extraordinary Act of God himself? Do we ever read that Mathematical or Natural Philosophy is made known to us by *internal, immediate, and original Revelation*? But why might not These be as well said to be reveal'd as Ethicks, if Revelation necessarily imported nothing more, than a Discovery made in the mere Use of Reason? The Truth is, I cannot but think the Gentleman had a Design to serve by this affected Singularity of Expression; and that his Intention was, to perplex and deceive his Readers.

However this Matter be, I must insist on it, That Revelation, in the proper Sense of the Word, signifies, The Discovery of some-



something made to us by an extraordinary Act on God's Part. If this be true, then Internal Revelation will be, the making this Discovery by some internal Act upon the Mind of that Person to whom it is made: Revelation is Immediate, when no subordinate Agent is employ'd, in order to convey the Discovery; and Original, when the Discovery is not deliver'd down in Succession, as Traditional Matters are. On the other hand, Revelation external signifies, the making Discoveries of certain Things, and confirming the Truth and Reality of them by external Evidence; Revelation mediate, is, the communicating to some, the Discoveries made to others, by immediate Revelation; and Traditional signifies, the conveying down from one to another, in Succession, those Discoveries, which may be trac'd up to original Revelation.

I might, after having noted the general Use of these Terms, and explain'd myself on the proper Meaning of them, apply them in a Sense different from this Author. But I shall chuse rather to forbear: And where this Author uses the term Internal Revelation, I shall express my self by the Discovery of Natural Reason; and what he calls External Revelation, I shall term Extraordinary Revelation.

This being noted, I shall pass on to the Great Point, which must be the Subject of  
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the present Chapter ; and observe, that Two Questions will here arise :

1. Whether a proper Rule of Life be more easily and more perfectly discoverable, in the mere Use of our Reason, than it can be by any immediate Act of The Supreme Being upon our Minds, revealing it to us ?

And,

2. Whether it be more easily and more perfectly discoverable in the Use of Reason, than the Proof or Meaning of that Revelation is, which hath either been deliver'd to us by the subordinate Instruments of Providence, or convey'd down to us from one to another in the traditionary way ? And tho' this latter Question is what I am principally concern'd to examine, yet the former must not be left untouch'd.

Let it be suppos'd then, if you please, that a proper Rule of Life is discoverable by us in the Exercise of Reason : Let it be suppos'd again, that this may be discover'd in the utmost Perfection, and without any discouraging Difficulties : Yet still, cannot The Supreme Being make the same Discoveries to us by an immediate Action upon our Minds, and without the Intervention of Reason in collecting them ? No doubt but he may do this, if he pleases : For, as the doing this implies no manner of Contradiction, and consequently must be the Object of Power ; so it must be free and open to him

him who is the original Fountain of Power. It is absurd to affirm, that He who created our very Beings, is incapable of acting upon them; or that he cannot as well impress Sentiments on the Mind, capable of receiving them, as produce Motion in Bodies capable of being mov'd. Now, such a Revelation as this, is commonly express'd by the word Inspiration; which, if God should be pleas'd to grant Men, this Question will arise; Whether Matters, discoverable by the ordinary Exercise of Reason, be more easily and perfectly discoverable that way, than they can be by Inspiration itself?

To determine this Question, I must observe, That by Reason, in this Place, must be meant the Faculty of deducing some Truths from others which were known before; This supposing some original Principles to build upon term'd Self-evident, makes out Conclusions by shewing their necessary Connexion with these Principles. The Rule of Life therefore consisting of a Variety of Precepts not evident of themselves, but proveable, must be made out by our Reason in the way of Inference: In which Case, in Proportion to the Degrees of Reason enjoy'd by any one, his Collection of Precepts will be more or less perfect, and made with greater or less Dispatch and Ease.

Give me Leave therefore to ask, Whether, upon Supposition that God should impress

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press on Mens Minds, in the way of Inspiration, a Sense of those Precepts which constitute the proper Rule of Life; — Let me ask, I say, Whether the Knowledge acquir'd this way, might not be as perfect or extensive, and as easily attain'd, as by the ordinary Exercise of Reason in the way of arguing. This surely cannot be made a Question, when we consider, that if God can make any one Kind of Impressions on us, he may make any other Kind which we are capable of receiving: And when he does so, the Precepts impress'd will have as certain an Evidence as that which belongs to Principles Self-evident: They will be perceiv'd with the same Ease; and therefore, cannot be more difficult to be apprehended, than those which are made out in a long Course of Arguing.

There is a Passage in our Author which seems to contradict what is asserted by me here; and upon which I must offer some Remarks before I dismiss this Point. "Were it not (says he) for those Self-evident Notions, which are the Foundation of all our Reasonings, there could be no intellectual Communication between God and Man; Nor, as we are fram'd, can God ascertain us of any Truth, but by shewing its Agreement with these Self-evident Notions, which are the Tests whereby we are to judge of every Thing, even the

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“the Being of a God, and Natural Religion,  
p. 184.

—I conceive from what hath been said above, there might be an intellectual Communication between God and Man, without any Regard had to those Self-evident Notions, of which our Author speaks. No one troubles himself about Self-evident Notions, in the mere Exercise of his Self-conscious Power, or the bare Perception of what passes within him. Whenever therefore God shall make any Impressions on us, These also may be perceiv'd, without any regard to Self-evident Notions. And, as the Impressions may be thus perceiv'd, so likewise may it be known from whence these Impressions come. For, no one can reckon it impossible but God may, if he pleases, make us as intimately conscious that these Impressions are made by him, as that any Impressions are made on us at all. Now, if this be true, then God may hold intellectual Communication with us, notwithstanding he should not refer us back to first and Self-evident Notions.

Our Author goes on; “Nor, as we are fram'd, can God ascertain us of any Truth, but by shewing its Agreement with those Self-evident Notions, which are the Foundation of all our Reasoning.” This is a very bold Limitation of The Divine Power; and the more inexcusable, because it is so evidently



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evidently void of all manner of Foundation. But, whilst our Author is asserting so boldly, and telling us so magisterially, what God can, or cannot do, it would have become him to have express'd himself in a clear and determinate manner; which, I conceive, he hath by no means done in the present Case. What, I would beg to know, does he mean by the *Agreement* of Truth with Self-evident Notions? Does he mean a Consistency with them? or, Does he mean a Connexion with them? If he intends the latter, (as I am led to think he does, from considering the Course of his Reasoning in this Paragraph), then his Assertion will amount to this, That God cannot ascertain us of any Truth, but by arguing us into it, and proving it to us in the visible Connexion it hath with first and Self-evident Principles. His Sentiments to this Purpose are plainly represented in another Place, p. 199. where he tells us, "The Holy Ghost cannot deal with Men  
" as rational Creatures, but by proposing Ar-  
" guments to convince their Understandings,  
" and influence their Wills, in the same  
" manner as if propos'd by other Agents;  
" For, to go beyond this, would be making  
" Impressions on Men as a Seal does on  
" Wax, to the confounding of their Reason  
" and Liberty in chusing, and the Man  
" would then be merely passive; and the  
" Action would be the Action of another  
" Being



" Being acting upon him, for which he  
 " could be no ways accountable."

Upon this State of the Matter I shall offer  
 Two Remarks :

1. That our Author's Assertions are absolutely false, and in their Consequences monstrous. And,

2. If they were true, they would not prejudice the main Point contended for under this Head.

As to the Truth of his Assertion, " That  
 " God cannot ascertain us of any Truth, but  
 " by shewing its Agreement with Self-evident  
 " Notions ; And, that The Holy Ghost  
 " cannot deal with Men as rational Creatures,  
 " but by proposing Arguments, &c. in  
 " the same manner as propos'd by other Agents ; " I must observe, that we may be, and often are certain of many Truths, without recurring to those Arguments, which shew their Connexion with Principles self-evident. In many Things we depend on the Authority of Men, whose Skill and Veracity we esteem ; and this in Proportion to the Assurance we have of their intellectual and moral Characters. It is true indeed, our Assent to Matters on this Foundation cannot be properly term'd Knowledge : But the Question is not here, Whether we can be properly said to know this way ; but, Whether we can receive Assurance from it. It must be confess'd farther, that forasmuch as Men are imperfect, as well with regard to their intellectual

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lectual Character as their moral, so we cannot receive any absolute Assurance in Matters which depend on mere human Authority. But yet, were there any Men absolutely incapable of being deceiv'd themselves, and of deceiving Others, we might then receive as great an Assurance concerning the Truth of Propositions affirm'd by them, as we are able to draw from Demonstration itself. The Certainty would be the same in both Cases, how much soever the Methods of producing it might differ. Put the Case then, that God himself shall affirm a Proposition; — shall either impress it on a Man's Mind in the Way of Inspiration, or convey it to Men confirm'd by such Proofs as are sufficient Evidences of a Divine Authority: — In this Case, I say, the Truth of the Proposition will be entirely certain; not perhaps from any appearing Connexion which the Proposition has with Notions self-evident; but from another Consideration which will equally secure its Truth, *viz.* That God hath affirm'd it, who can neither err, nor deceive.

Thus much with regard to speculative Propositions: In reference to practical, or those Precepts by which we are to direct our Behaviour, the Point will be, if possible, clearer. The proper Question on this Head must be, What is the Will of God: And this must be discover'd to us, either in the Use of our natural Reason, or else by extraordinary

Communication from God himself. In the former Way Men argue from the Nature and Fitness of the Thing, that the Wise and Good Author of our Being must will it; from whose Will, thus discover'd, our Obligation to conform ourselves to these Precepts is derived. Now if such Rules, founded in Fitness, become to us Precepts or Laws, not merely on Account of the Fitness itself, but because they are the Will of God; and if the Consideration of Fitness is only one Way whereby we come to learn What God's Will, in this respect, is; — then, whatever else will point out God's Will, must equally discover those Precepts. But the Case then that a Body of Laws is deliver'd: May we not be assur'd, that these Laws are the Will of God, from the very Delivery and Confirmation of them, unless we are argued into it in the other Way, by tracing Matters up to self-evident Principles? Is it any more impossible for God to manifest his Will by an express Declaration of it, than it is for Man to do so? And yet we see, this is done every Day in Civil and Domestick Concerns. And we think ourselves sufficiently appriz'd of the Will of our Superiors by their express Declarations, without enquiring nicely on what Reasons they proceed, and what Connection there is between the Precepts given and other necessary and self-evident Truths.

*\* This is very crafty & very false; The Person he is arguing against maintains that it is the Fitness of Precept which discovers it to be God's Will, & that as no precept can come from God, but what has the mark of*

*Fitness in It, This Fitness is therefore the only Criterion that such precept is his Will — or at least renders all other Marks unnecessary*

*God's Will is God's necessary*

Nor will it follow at all from hence, as our Author contends it must, that if The Holy Ghost should deal with us otherwise than merely by proposing Arguments; — that if he should inform us directly what God requires, without assigning the Ground and Reason of the Command, “This would be a making Impressions on Men, as a Seal does on Wax, to the confounding of their Reason, and Liberty in Choosing.” Let the Gentleman shew me, How this confounds Reason at all: Let him tell me, What One Principle of Reason it contradicts; or, in what respect it crosses upon, or hinders the Exercise of Reason. For, even in this Case, tho’ the Precept be deliver’d without assigning the Reason of it, yet Men are still at Liberty to search out the Reason, if they please: And whilst they maintain an unreserv’d Obedience to the Divine Will, the Application of their Reason to this purpose will be proper, and, upon that Account, acceptable to God. But What if, after all, the real Ground of the Precept given shall still conceal itself? Why, even in this Case there will appear a sufficient Reason for Obedience, because God himself enjoins it: So far as this, Reason still directs us; and consequently, cannot be oppos’d, or confounded this Way.

But he adds farther, that this destroys Liberty; — that “the Man would then be passive; and the Action would be the Action of



“ another Being acting upon him, for which  
 “ he could be no ways accountable. ” But  
 let me ask, In what respect is the Man passive?  
 What is the Action, concerning which our  
 Author here speaks? and, What is that  
 Thing for which he cannot, in this Case, be  
 accountable? Why, All this must be referr'd  
 to the Act of Inspiration, or that Act where-  
 by the Will of God is made known to him  
 in a Way extraordinary. In this respect Man  
 is, no doubt, passive: The Action is the  
 Action not of the Man but of the Inspirer; and  
 for having or not having this Action exerted  
 upon him he cannot be accountable: Whe-  
 ther a Man shall be really inspir'd or not, is  
 not the Concern of his own Liberty, but God's.  
 But, what then? Is not a Man still free  
 either to obey those reveal'd Precepts, or to  
 disobey them? and consequently, Is not the  
 natural Liberty of Action as well maintain'd  
 in this way as in our Author's? Surely this  
 cannot need a Proof.

Hitherto I have endeavour'd, in the direct  
 way of Argument, to refute our Author's  
 gross Assertion, “ That God cannot ascertain  
 “ us of any Truth, but by shewing the Con-  
 “ nexion it hath with self-evident Notions: ”  
 I shall now advance a Step farther, and point  
 out some of the monstrous Consequences  
 which will follow upon Supposition that the  
 before-mentioned Assertion is true.

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REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 295

The Assertion must resolve itself into this Principle, *viz.* That we cannot be ascertain'd of any Truth whatsoever, but in that way of tracing Matters which our Author hath insist-  
ed on. If this be admitted, then how came we to be ascertain'd of these first Principles or self-evident Notions themselves? Not surely by tracing them back to other self-evident Principles: This our Author, bold as he is, will not suppose: Or, if he should, he must be reduc'd to this Absurdity, *viz.* That we cannot be ascertain'd of any Thing but by tracing it back from Principle to Principle *in infinitum, i. e.* We can never be certain of any Thing at all. What, again, will he say of Sensitive Knowledge, or the Assurance we have of Things without us in the Exercise of our Senses? This certainly is not made out by any Connexion which these Things have with other self-evident Truths. Or, will he affirm, That we cannot be sure of any Thing upon  
\*the Credit of Human Testimony? Then farewell not only to the Faith of History, but to all civil Faith: The Ties of Society, and the Grounds of Commerce are destroy'd entirely. Or, will this Gentleman affirm, That civil Governors cannot prescribe to their Subjects otherwise than by teaching them the Reason and Fitness of their Commands, — by applying to them in the demonstrative Way, and arguing them into Obedience just as Philosophers instruct their Pupils? And

*See my  
note 306*

What a weak Inference is this, that  
Civil Magistrates did not stand more  
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Shew of yet, this he must affirm, if the Position he  
Power than hath laid down be true, unless he will allow  
y<sup>e</sup> Supreme more to Civil Magistrates, than he doth to  
Being; for the Supreme Governor of the Universe.  
all or as if These are Consequences so manifestly follow-  
a Compari- ing from what our Author hath advanced,  
son could and so extravagant in themselves, that I can-  
ly behave not think any Thing farther is necessary to  
impotent overthrow this Position, than to point out  
e often these Consequences.

partial After all, supposing what our Author  
legislators hath here asserted were true, yet still it  
whose laws would not prejudice the main Thing con-  
are most tended for under this Head; nor prove in  
commonly the least, that a proper Rule of Life is more  
made for perfectly and more easily discoverable by us  
their own in the ordinary Use of Reason, than it can  
sakes, & so be by a special Revelation from God.

will not bear Let us imagine then, however extravagant  
reasoning the Imagination may seem, "that God can-  
on, & c. "not ascertain us of any Truth but by shew-  
Self-sufficient ing its Agreement with self-evident No-  
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who can't deal with Men as rational Creatures, but  
therefore be supposed to give any laws by proposing Arguments, &c. in the  
but for the good of those who are to same manner as propos'd by other Agents;"  
observe 'em yet still I say, If God may act directly upon  
the Mind, he may, by this Means, assist  
our natural Powers; He may make some  
Matters appear to us, which would never  
have appear'd otherwise; He may shew  
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more distinctly; or, carry us on from one Conclusion to another, thro' the whole Course of the Argument, with much greater Dispatch and Ease. Don't we see, that notwithstanding we all of us enjoy certain Portions of natural Reason, by the Use of which we are capable of making Improvements in the several Sciences, yet we act this Way with much better Success whilst directed by some skilful Person, than if we had been left entirely to ourselves. The Reason of this is plain enough: It is not the mere Power of Reason, but the Exercise of this Power which discovers Truth to us: And in this Exercise it is necessary, that the several Ideas by which a Conclusion is made out, should be laid in their proper Order: This a faithful Teacher may instruct us to do; in Consequence of which those Truths shall become manifest, which might otherwise not have appear'd at all. Supposing therefore, that God cannot deal with us as rational Creatures, but by applying to our Reason; yet if we allow, (as we must allow), that he may order a proper Train of Ideas in our Minds, — that he may strengthen the very Faculty of Reason itself, and fix our Thoughts on those Matters we are concern'd to attend to, it will follow, not only that some Things shall appear in a stronger Light, but likewise that others shall offer



offer themselves, which might not have been discover'd on any other Foot at all.

I do by no means affirm, that this is the whole Amount of Divine Inspiration. Doubtless it reaches much farther than this comes to. All that is intended here, is This; that our Author cannot maintain his Ground even upon his own Terms, and that some of the great Branches of his Scheme may be overthrown even by granting the main Principles he contends for.

But still it will be alledg'd, that what I have advanc'd hitherto doth not come up to the Point. For, supposing that God might make Matters clearer to us by immediate Inspiration, than they are in the ordinary Use of our Faculties, yet How is the Cause of Reveal'd Religion at all supported? Is it pretended on our Part, that this Religion is made known to all Men by immediate Revelation? Was it not, (if ever reveal'd at all), originally reveal'd to a few, and deliver'd by them to others? Was not the Religion, now receiv'd by us as reveal'd, deliver'd down from one to another in a long Succession of Ages, if it hath really been so deliver'd down, and was not rather the Invention of Priests in some dark Ages? In short, whilst Matters stand on this Foot, our Author thinks a proper Rule of Life may be discover'd more perfectly and more easily in the Use of Reason, and that by Persons of  
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the meanest Capacities, than either the Proof, or Meaning of such a traditional Revelation can be.

I have shewn in my former Chapter, by several Passages cited from this Author's Book, that he reckons every Man, even those of the meanest Understanding, capable of discovering a proper Rule of Life perfectly and with Ease. Things of this Kind, he tells us, are strictly demonstrable from the Natures of Things, and the Relation which we bear to God, and our Fellow Creatures. But the Case is otherwise as to a traditional Revelation: " That God reveal'd  
" himself by *Visions, Dreams, Trances*, or  
" any other Way besides the Light of Na-  
" ture, can only come under the Head of  
" Probability. And if it be but probable  
" that God made any external Revelation at  
" all, it can be but probable, tho', perhaps,  
" not in the same Degree of Probability that  
" he made this or that Revelation. And  
" this Evidence all pretend to, since, per-  
" haps, there never was a Time or Place,  
" where some external Revelation was not  
" believed, and its Votaries equally confi-  
" dent that theirs was a true Revelation.  
" And, indeed, the prodigious Numbers of  
" Revelations, which from Time to Time  
" have been in the World, shew how easily  
" Mankind may in this Point be impos'd  
" upon. And as there can be no Demon-  
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" stration of the Revelation itself, so neither  
 " can there be of its Conveyance to Poste-  
 " rity; much less, that This or That has  
 " been convey'd entire to distant Times and  
 " Places; especially if a Revelation be of  
 " any Bulk, and which may have gone  
 " thro' the Hands of Men, who not only in  
 " the dark Ages of the Church, but even in  
 " the Beginning, if we judge by the Num-  
 " ber of corrupted Passages, and even forg'd  
 " Books, were capable of any pious Fraud.  
 " Nay, the very Nature of Probability is  
 " such, that were it only left to Time itself,  
 " even that would wear it quite out." p. 184,  
 185. The Passage here produc'd, takes in the  
 principal Things alledg'd by this Writer, to  
 shew the Uncertainty which every traditio-  
 nal Revelation must carry with it; and con-  
 sequently, how ineffectual it must be, when  
 compar'd with common Reason, to ascertain  
 a proper Rule of Life.

But, however certain and evident the Proof  
 of the Revelation should be, yet still our  
 Author maintains it must be obscure and  
 difficult as to its Meaning. To this purpose  
 he observes, " Had there been but one Lan-  
 " guage, and a Book writ in that Language,  
 " in indelible Characters, (so that there could  
 " be none of those Thirty Thousand vari-  
 " ous Readings, which are own'd to have  
 " crept into the New Testament,) and all  
 " could have Access to it, yet even then,

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“ considering how uncertain the Meaning of  
 “ Words are, and the Interest of designing  
 “ Men to put a wrong Sense on them, it  
 “ must be morally impossible that this Reli-  
 “ gion could long continue the same.” p. 288.

There is another Passage, p. 290, in which  
 our Author carries the Matter somewhat far-  
 ther. “ There are, says he, scarce any  
 “ Words in any one Language, except of  
 “ such Things as immediately strike the  
 “ Senses, that are adequately answer'd in  
 “ another, so as exactly to comprehend the  
 “ same Ideas: And if the Ideas are only  
 “ fewer or more, what Confusion may not  
 “ that occasion? How great and frequent  
 “ must the Mistakes Then be in translating  
 “ the antiquated Languages of People who  
 “ liv'd at a vast Distance of Time, as well  
 “ as in Countries far remote; and affected  
 “ hyperbolical, parabolical, mystical, alle-  
 “ gorical, and typical Ways of expressing  
 “ themselves, as opposite to the Usage in  
 “ other Parts as East is to the West? And  
 “ not only this, but it will be likewise ne-  
 “ cessary to have an accurate Knowledge  
 “ of their Manners, Customs, Traditions,  
 “ Philosophy, Religious Notions, Sects,  
 “ Civil and Ecclesiastical Polity; of all which  
 “ the common People know as little as they  
 “ do of the original Languages; who hav-  
 “ ing very obscure and incompetent Con-  
 “ ceptions of the principal Words and Phra-  
 “ ses



" ses us'd in the Versions, their Religion  
 " must needs be a very odd Jumble of con-  
 " fus'd and inconsistent Notions, were it to  
 " depend on Words, and their precise Mean-  
 " ing, and not on the Things themselves,  
 " and their Relations, which are plain and  
 " obvious to common Capacities; they would  
 " be in a manner entirely govern'd by Sounds,  
 " some of which, such as they us'd to hear  
 " spoken of with respect, they would high-  
 " ly reverence; while others, tho' of the  
 " same Signification, they would as much  
 " abhor, 'till Custom had made them fami-  
 " liar. "

I shall begin with examining what our Au-  
 thor hath advanc'd in relation to the Proof  
 and Evidence of a traditional Religion; the  
 Sum of which may, I think, be reduc'd to  
 the following Particulars; 1. That the Proof  
 of a traditional Revelation can only come un-  
 der the Head of Probability; whereas the  
 Evidence of a proper Rule of Life is, upon  
 Principles of natural Reason, demonstrative.  
 2. That this Argument from Probability  
 labours under great Difficulties upon account  
 of the several Pretences to Revelation which  
 have been confidently insisted on in almost  
 every Age of the World, and the Cre-  
 dulity of Mankind in admitting such Pre-  
 tentences. 3. That there is great Uncertainty  
 in the Conveyance, arising from the Frauds  
 of Men, who may corrupt some Things, and  
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forge others, and have several Times in Fact done so. To which he adds, 4. That if the foregoing Difficulties were given up, yet the Nature of Probability is such, that were it only left to Time itself, even that would wear it quite out.

Upon the 1st Branch of this Gentleman's Objection I must observe, that however a proper Rule of Life may be in itself demonstrable, yet What doth This signify in order to fix and settle it, if Men are incapable of making out this Demonstration? How difficult this really is, even to Men of Thought and Learning, may appear by the Passage before cited from Mr. *Lock*, who car'd not to attempt the Work, tho' he saw clearly it was in itself capable of being done.

Having mentioned Mr. *Lock* here, I shall take the Liberty to add another Passage in his *Familiar Letters*, [p. 144] as very pertinent in this Place. "When I consider that  
"a Book of Offices — ought not to be  
"slightly done, especially by me, after  
"what I have said of that Science in my  
"Essay, — I am in Doubt whether it would  
"be prudent in one of my Age and Health,  
"not to mention other Disabilities, to set  
"about it. Did the World want a Rule, I  
"confess there could be no Work so ne-  
"cessary, nor so commendable. \* But the  
"Gospel contains so perfect a Body of  
"Ethicks, that Reason may be excus'd from

*that*  
when he wrote his Essay, &c. Sec<sup>nd</sup> further  
kind to give y<sup>e</sup> World a System of Morality,  
ie Such Works he must have then judg'd  
less & impertinent, but this is not y<sup>e</sup> sole  
tance of his accomodation in some points,

*Sincerely thought that, why should he  
this passage, object the Imprudence  
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## A DEFENCE of

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that Enquiry; since he may find Man's Duty clearer and easier in Revelation, than in herself. Think not this the Excuse of a lazy Man, tho' it be perhaps of one, who having a sufficient Rule of his Actions, is content therewith. We see this excellent Person had other Notions of traditional Revelation than the Gentleman I am now debating with. He tells us, that Reason may be excus'd from the Enquiry, since he may find Man's Duty clearer, and easier in Revelation, than in herself. And this he affirms, tho' he knew well at the same Time, that the Proof of a traditional Revelation was not of that Kind which is strictly and properly demonstrative.

To return: I must assert, that altho' Morality be in itself demonstrable; yet so few Men being capable of making it out in the demonstrative Way, they must, for the most Part, act upon Evidence which is only probable. This, I say, must be the Case, even tho' we should suppose that Religion substituted only as the Prescription of human Reason. Even here Men do, and must determine themselves on numberless Occasions by Arguments probable; by Arguments, where the Principles they build on are to them only probable; or at least where the Connexion, and Dependence of one Part of the Argument upon another shall only appear to be so. Yet still Morality is not sub-

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# REVEAL'D RELIGION, Or. 305

verted by this: Men are concern'd in this Case, to do the best they can; and must content themselves with strong Probabilities, where strict and proper Demonstration may not be had by them.

I shall advance a Step farther, and affirm, that in many Instances the Assurance arising from the Concurrence of several Probabilities, is as effectual, and will lay as strong a Foundation to determining us in our Conduct, as Demonstration itself. It is on this Foot we regulate our Behaviour in Civil Life. He who should refuse to obey a Civil Law 'till he had strict Demonstration that it really was a Civil Law, would be quickly taught to alter his Measures, in a way he would not like. In all Cases of this Nature we do, and must build on such Probabilities, as the Nature of the Thing will admit of. These, I say, Men act upon, and upon these they must act, if they act at all.

Nor is it any Prejudice to our Assurance, that in Matters built on probable Evidence, there remains a Possibility of Mistake; or that in such Cases we have sometimes been deceiv'd formerly: Will it follow from hence, that we can have no sufficient Assurance this Way? Are we to give no Credit to the Evidence of Sense, because we have sometimes err'd by depending on it? Or, may we not be certain in any one Case whatsoever, that we are not deceiv'd, because we discover that in some

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Cases

*The Dean has an excellent Talent for Illustration, indeed his Subject does require it, but there is this difference in his simile that if medicine sums by 10 is one. A novel fact was enacted, are such at common*

*experience proves capable of conceiving such knowledge with a greater certainty than with Relation to divine facts, beside knowing there have been many impostors who could their own Fictions such*

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## A DEFENCE of

Cases we have been deceiv'd? I think the very contrary to this is true; and because we know that in some Cases we have been deceiv'd, we are therefore certain that we are not deceiv'd always.

Let us admit then, that the Evidence of a traditional Revelation is not strictly a demonstrative Evidence; What Conclusion, I pray, can be drawn from hence? Is it therefore no Evidence at all; or, Must it therefore be an insufficient and precarious one? Is it, in the Nature of Things, impossible that any Man should have such Proof of a Revelation made in any distant Age, as shall carry with it sufficient Weight to determine the Assent of a sober and thinking Man? \*He who will assert this, must assert withal, that 'tis impossible to have any sufficient Assurance of past Facts at all; and consequently, all the Evidence of ancient History must fall of Course.

\* This won't  
pass; The  
Reason why  
we assent  
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of past Facts  
in History, is  
not barely  
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But our Author will return upon us, That the Question at present is, Whether the Evidence of Natural Religion, and of Reveal'd, be equally strong: And in Proof of the Negative, he alledges, That the One is demonstrable, whilst the other can subsist only on Probability. The Evidence therefore in the one Case must be more perfect, than it is, or can possibly be in the other.

I conceive, what is here alledg'd, will amount to nothing, if it be true, (as hath been  
They are in emselves probable, such  
which in many Cases the Experience of  
own Times shew might have happen'd, but  
man of sense gives equal Credit to a Miracle  
what person of this Character did not



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REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 307

been noted before) that however demonstrable in themselves several Particulars of what he calls Natural Religion may be, yet many Parts of it are not demonstrable by the Generality of Men, and some may be assign'd which are not demonstrable by any Man; That whilst some Things, in themselves fit and proper, are absolutely undiscoverable in the mere Use of our Reason, others require more Pains and Care than most Men are willing to lay out about them. Revelation therefore, tho' the Evidence of it should not be strictly demonstrative; yet as it gives us an Insight into some Things not at all discoverable by our Natural Reason, must of Consequence make the Discovery of a proper Rule of Life more perfect. To which we may add, That while it saves us the Trouble of tedious Reasoning, and long Deduction, the Discovery must be made with greater Dispatch and Ease. And tho' to build on such a traditional Revelation, is not to build on strict Demonstration; yet if the Evidence in this Case be as perfect as the Nature of the Thing will admit of, we shall have no more Cause to doubt concerning the Certainty of the Evidence, than we have to question the Force of Demonstration.

But, admitting that probable Evidence may be in some Cases abundantly sufficient, yet our Author objects, Secondly, that in the

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present Instance the Point labours under extraordinary Difficulties. Several groundless Pretences to Revelation have been confidently insisted on in several Ages of the World; and have succeeded so far, as to gain Credit from a considerable Part of Mankind.

I am surpriz'd that this Gentleman should lay such Stress on an Objection, which hath been so often answer'd, without endeavouring to support it by making the least Reply to Matters offer'd in Bar of this Objection. Let us suppose that there have been as many Pretences to Revelation, as he pleases; Doth it follow, that these Pretences must all of them be alike? If there have been many Impostures, can there be no such Thing as Truth in the World? Or, if several Men have made groundless Claims to a Divine Authority, can there be no real Ground of Divine Authority at all? One might be rather apt to conclude the contrary, and to think that if there had never been any Divine Revelation, Men would not have been so forward either on the one hand to make Pretences of this Kind, or, on the other, to give Credit to them. For, as Falshood always supposes some Truth, so Imposture cannot succeed unless it puts on the Appearance of that which is, or hath been real.

To take the Objection in another Light; I will suppose it is design'd, not so much to prove that there never hath in Fact been any thought either there was no God, or that he never concern'd himself with the affairs of Mankind; what his Credulous followers might think is another Matter

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any Divine Revelation, as to shew the Difficulty of forming a Judgment about the Reality of a particular Revelation. The Difficulty arises from hence, that "there never was a Time or Place where some Divine Revelation was not believ'd, and its Votaries equally confident that their's was a true Revelation." But what, after all, can be concluded from this? Why, just thus much, and no more, that Men are very often lazy, unapt to think for themselves, and ready to give Credit to every confident Asserter. This is indeed true, and must not be contested. But then the Question is, not what Men may be apt sometimes to do, but what they are capable of doing on such Occasions. The Question is, not whether indolent Men will give Ear to bold Pretenders, rather than examine their Pretences; but, Whether they have any sufficient Abilities to distinguish between Reality and Imposture. This, I presume, they may do, if they please; especially since the Point to be consider'd is a Point of Fact, concerning which, in other Instances, we find Men are sagacious enough, and not so liable to err, whilst they give themselves proper Pains.

After all, if our Author thinks there is really any Thing so formidable in the Objection, and that Men cannot distinguish between a real Divine Authority and a pre-

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nevertheless from Inquiry when they severally believe their own Religion the right  
 This is Man's very Nature & its Sophistry  
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## A DEFENCE of

tended one, amidst such a Variety of Pretences, let me desire him to shew, how they are capable of judging concerning philosophical and abstract Reasoning. Is it so much easier to go thro' a long Train of perplex'd Arguing, than to determine concerning the Probability of Facts, to which Men were not themselves Witnesses? Do we not see, in daily Experience, that Persons, who having been unus'd to close Thinking, can make out very few Matters that way, can yet relate Things with Exactness enough which they have done themselves, and pass very shrewd Judgments on the Truth or Falshood, Probability or Improbability of Things affirm'd to have been done by others. And doth not our Civil State itself presume them so capable of doing this, as to commit the Trial of such Matters of Fact even to a Jury of ordinary Persons? Where then is the Impossibility, or Difficulty, according to the common Sense of the World, that such Persons should judge rightly of the Pretences to Revelation, whilst these Pretences are to be determin'd by the Evidence of Facts, concerning which they are allow'd to judge in civil Matters.

But, says our Author, This is not all: Several other Things are to be consider'd: Difficulties will not only arise from the various and confident Pretences to Revelation, but likewise, Thirdly, from the Uncertainty of



of the Conveyance. Books may, in Tract of Time, be forg'd, or Passages corrupted : and How shall Men distinguish between the true original Revelation, and those Corruptions which may have been made, or have in several Ages crept in ?

It will be enough, in Reply to this, to alledge, That mere Possibilities are of no Moment in the Case : That if, on the one hand, it be affirm'd, such Things *may be* ; on the other, it may as well be said, they *may not be* ; That we are not now debating concerning absolute Demonstration, which admits no Possibility on the other Side, but only concerning Probability : To which it is no manner of Prejudice that Errors are possible ; since possible, in the strict Sense of the Word, they must be ; otherwise the Evidence would not be probable only, but absolute.

Let our Author therefore call upon us as much as he pleases, to prove that our traditional Revelation is genuine, and that it hath suffer'd Nothing from Either Forgery or Corruption. On this Head we are not oblig'd to answer him at all. It is his Business to prove the Forgery or Corruption ; or at least to support his Point by Arguments as probable as those are by which we evince the Revelation in general. If this be not done, we may safely presume, that no Parts of what we receive as a Revelation



from God, have been really forg'd ; and that no such Corruptions have crept in, as shall make any material Difference in the Case.

But he presses us farther ; and maintains, that Suspensions of this Kind are well grounded ; That the Persons thro' whose Hands these Books have gone, have been eminent this way ; and " that they were capable of any " pious Frauds, if we may judge by the " Number of Passages corrupted, and of " Books forged by them. "

But how comes this Gentleman to know that any Books have been forg'd, or any Passages corrupted ? Why, principally by this Means ; that Persons, capable of discovering the Fraud, have made it out to him. Very well : Upon this Foot such Books and Passages are entirely given up by us ; and when any Thing of the same Kind is equally prov'd of other Books or Passages, we shall as readily give them up too. But must we be ever suspicious and doubtful, and admit Nothing as Truth, because Some Falshoods have been detected ? I should rather be tempted to think, that the Detection of such Frauds gives us a Security, that other Books which concern our Religion, and against which no Objection can be made, are genuine. For the same Zeal and Honesty, by which some Frauds have been detected, would equally have carry'd Men on to discover

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cover others, had any others been indeed discoverable, or rather, had there been any others remaining.

I need not enter minutely into the several Methods by which Forgeries or Corruptions have been, or may be discover'd. The chiefest are, I conceive, These; Either the Testimony of ancient Writers; — or, the Variety of ancient Copies; — or, the Nature of the Writings themselves. Let all the Remarks which can be drawn from these Heads be applied, if this Gentleman pleases, on the present Occasion. Let the Scriptures be try'd on this Foot. And let us see whether the Genuineness of these Writings can be defended, or no. If they cannot, I have no more to say. But if they can be defended, shall this Gentleman's groundless Presumptions be taken for Proof? Shall it be sufficient to say, In a long Tract of Time Corruptions may have crept in; and therefore You must prove They have not in Fact crept in? This, Sir, we are by no means bound to prove. No one can be put on proving the Negative in such a Case as this. — It is your Business to evince and support your positive Side of the Question; Otherwise, what you advance, must pass for so many bold and groundless Assertions.

We have the more Reason to insist on this, because, from the very Nature of the Thing, it appears, that such Forgeries or  
Corrup-

Corruptions could not have obtain'd Credit so universally, as to make the particular Detection of them either impossible or difficult. We do not lay the Stress of the Point on This only, (as our Author pretends we do), "That no Change could be made in our Religion in After-times; the Care Men have of their own Souls, as well as their natural Affection for their Posterity, obliging them, from Generation to Generation, to hand down their Religion as they receiv'd it." p. 233. This is a Using us ill; and a Representing us as affirming, not what we really do affirm, but what it is most for his Purpose we should affirm. The real State of the Case is This; Numerous Copies of those Writings, in which our Religion is contain'd, were immediately dispers'd Abroad; They were kept as a sacred Treasure; They were read, and studied with Care; Some of the principal Parts of them were constantly recited in the publick Assemblies of Christians; They were translated into a Variety of Languages; spread thro' the most distant Parts of the World; and Passages from them cited by numerous Writers: To which may be added, that there sprang up, in the very earliest Ages, a Variety of Sects, which oppos'd and hated each other, and therefore were a constant Guard against Imposture and Corruption from any hand. Now, if it shall appear, under all these



these Circumstances, that the very same Books have thro' all Ages been generally admitted as Canonical; If these Books are, as to every Thing of Moment, the same in all the several Copies and Versions; If the Texts cited from them by the several Writers, who built on their Authority, agree, as to the main, with these Copies; What can be concluded, but the Genuineness and Incorruptness of these Writings? He, who notwithstanding these strong Presumptions, shall still suspect the contrary, must run himself on these monstrous Absurdities; That a great Part of Mankind have at once, in very remote Parts of the World, agreed in the Forgery, or Corruption; That they have agreed to destroy all the old Copies, and to forge new ones; to alter all the several Versions which had been made of them; to corrupt Passages in a Variety of Authors, which likewise could not be done without altering the main Drift of the Books themselves; And, (which is still more incredible,) that this should be done by Persons who hated and persecuted each other, and who could not have brought either more Credit to their own Side, or Reproach on their Adversaries, than by detecting such Impositions. He who is capable of believing all this, must not complain of Credulity in others.

Our Author will proceed still, and demand, How shall the common People determine upon

upon the Point? Are They able to have Recourse to all these several Copies, and Versions, &c. Do they understand the very Languages in which they are written? Or, if they did, Are They capable of forming any tolerable Judgment upon the Whole? If not, then "all Mankind, very few excepted, are alike bound in all Places to pin their Faith on their Priests, and believe in Men, who have an Interest to deceive them, and who have seldom fail'd to do so when Occasion serves?"

I shall make no Return for the Compliment here paid to the Priests, or to any other of those unjust Reproaches which this Gentleman hath cast on that Order of Men. I shall only observe, in reference to Priests, that whilst he Abuses them in one respect, as a Set of Knaves and Villains, he insinuates something too much to their Advantage in another. For to say, (as say it he does), "That Religion must carry such internal Marks of its Truth, as Men of mean Capacities are able to discover; or else, — all Mankind, a very few excepted, are alike bound, in all Places, to pin their Faith on their Priests;" is, to make the Priests almost the only Persons in the World of Sense and Learning, and capable of judging concerning the external Evidence of a Revelation. This, I must confess, is an Honour which we cannot by any means lay Claim





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Claim to. There are great Numbers amongst the Laity of singular Parts and Learning; and we are oblig'd to these worthy Gentlemen for some remarkable Defences of our Religion. How then is it, upon this Supposition, necessary, that all Mankind, a few only excepted, should pin their Faith on their Priests? What! is Nothing to be learn'd from any of the Laity? or, Are these Gentlemen content with judging for themselves, without giving any manner of Assistance to others?

Well, but what of all this? If the Generality of Mankind cannot examine either these several Copies in the Original Language, or the several Versions which have been made of them, &c. from whence the Incorruptness of the Scriptures may be prov'd, it is plain they must build on the mere Authority of other Men; they must pin their Faith on Men, whether Priests or Laity it matters not: And is this a Circumstance to be admitted in so important a Matter as Religion?

The Points here are Matters of Fact; viz. Whether there really are numerous Copies of the Records of our Religion in the original Language; Whether there have been, and still are subsisting numerous Versions of these Records; Whether a vast Number of Passages have been from Time to Time cited from them in Books which are still extant; And Whether these do all of them so far agree as

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to shew the Genuineness and Incorruptness of these Records. Concerning these Points the greatest Part of Mankind cannot search for themselves. They neither understand all the several Languages in which they are written; nor, if they did, have they sufficient Opportunity to examine them personally, or to gain Assurance from their own immediate Searches. But what then! Can they have no sufficient Assurance at all concerning Matters of this Nature? Are we to believe Nothing upon the Testimony of others? Are we not to be determin'd by the best Evidence which the Nature of the Thing, and our own Circumstances will allow of? — by such Evidence, that we could not obtain greater in our present Condition, tho' the Thing itself were true? Must we insist on Demonstration where Nothing can be had but human Testimony; or deny all Weight to it, where we are unable to confirm it by our own Experience? If there have been some Impostures, yet is Knavery so essential to Human Nature, that all Men must on that account, be suspected? To come more close to the Point: Shall Nothing be allow'd to the General Reputation which Men have obtain'd for their Skill, and Integrity? — to the Concurrence of many, nay of all who have examined into these Matters; — of Persons, tho' Priests, yet of different Communions, and willing to find as many Faults

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as they could with one another; ——— nay, not only of Priests, but of the Laity likewise; and where there is not a single Person, not even amongst this Gentleman's diligent and quick-sighted Acquaintance, who hath pretended to make out any one particular Instance of Imposture, or any one important Corruption in the Sacred Writings? On such a Foot as this I should presume the Matter is so thoroughly settled, that there can be none Occasion, even for the Learned themselves, to enter farther into the Enquiry. What is attested as a Fact by so many Persons of Skill and Honesty, and who had all the Inducements to cross one another, had they any fair Occasion of doing it, may surely be depended on. But these Facts once admitted, will immediately prove our Point; and of this Consequence every Man can judge, who is capable of drawing any Conclusions at all.

There is a Fourth Branch of our Author's Objection still remaining, viz. "That the Nature of Probability itself is such, that were it only left to Time, even that would wear it quite out." This Objection against the Evidence of a traditional Revelation he endeavours to support, by referring us to Mr. Craig's *Principia Mathematica Theologiae Christianae*, and by a Citation from Mr. Locke's *Essay*.

The Gentleman seems to lay so little Stress on Mr. Craig's Demonstration, having only  
just



just referr'd to it, that I cannot think myself any farther concern'd than to observe, that this Subject hath likewise been handled in the *Philosophical Transactions*, No. 359. Thither I shall in my Turn refer him. But as the Passage from Mr. *Locke* is introduc'd with an Air of Confidence, it may be proper to consider it as here apply'd by this Gentleman.

" I think (says Mr. *Locke*) it may not be  
 " amiss to take Notice of a Rule observ'd  
 " in the Law of *England*; which is, that  
 " tho' the attested Copy of a Record be good  
 " Proof, yet the Copy of a Copy never so  
 " well attested, and by never so credible  
 " Witnesses, will not be admitted as Proof  
 " in Judicature. This is so generally ap-  
 " prov'd as reasonable, and suited to the  
 " Wisdom and Caution to be us'd in our En-  
 " quiry after material Truths, that I never  
 " yet heard of any one that blam'd it. This  
 " Practice, if it be allowable in the Decision  
 " of Right and Wrong, carries this Observa-  
 " tion along with it, viz. That any Testi-  
 " mony, the farther off it is from the origi-  
 " nal Truth, the less Force and Proof it has.  
 " The Being and Existence of the Thing it-  
 " self is what I call the original Truth. A  
 " credible Man vouching his Knowledge of  
 " it, is a good Proof. But if another equally  
 " credible do witness it from his Report,  
 " the Testimony is weaker: And a third  
 " that attests the Hearsay of a Hearsay, is  
 " yet

“ yet less considerable: So that in tradi-  
 “ onal Truths, each Remove weakens the  
 “ Force of the Proof; and the more Hands  
 “ the Tradition has successively pass'd thro',  
 “ the less Strength and Evidence does it re-  
 “ ceive from them. ” *Locke's Essay*, L. 4.  
 C. 16. §. 10.

What Mr. *Locke* hath here advanc'd is true and reasonable: But our Author hath been pleas'd to apply it to a Purpose quite different from what Mr. *L.* intended, and for which it will by no means serve: So that, admitting what is here laid down as true in the Premises, we may deny all the Conclusions which our Author would deduce from them.

There are Two Things here asserted.  
 1. That, tho' the attested Copy of a Record be good Proof, yet the Copy of a Copy, never so well attested, and by never so credible Witnesses, will not be admitted as Proof in Judicature. And, 2. That in traditional Truths in the general, each Remove weakens the Force of the Proof produc'd.

The Matter of Fact asserted under the first Article is admitted; And the Ground of this Proceeding in Civil Courts seems to be, That the Original Record, or an attested Copy is capable of being produc'd. In general, it is as easy to produce one of these, perhaps more so, than to get Evidence at a greater Remove from the Original. If this be true,  
 Y then



then why should any such distant Proof be offer'd? Must it not look as tho' some Art were intended to corrupt Matters, and to disguise the Truth, when Men chuse to step so much out of the Way, and to offer remote Evidence, in Cases where a nearer one may be had with greater Dispatch and Ease? — But, can any such Reason be alledg'd in the present Case? Is it, in the Nature of Things, as possible and easy to produce the Originals, or attested Copies of the Scriptures, even supposing there is no Forgery or Corruption, as 'tis to do so in Matters which come before a Civil Court? If not, then these Two Cases are vastly different; and a Rule which may be thought reasonable in the one, will be unreasonable and absurd in the other.

After all, it must be allow'd, that, whilst Men are fallible, and capable of acting wrong, absolute Certainty cannot arise from human Testimony. Upon this Account we must allow likewise, that, in every Remove of traditional Truths, the Force of their Evidence is weaken'd: In Traditions by Hearsay, the Point is apparent at first Sight; and will be found to hold proportionably as to written Traditions. Supposing it therefore, in this View of Things, possible that Time itself may wear out all the Force of Proof depending on traditional Evidence, Can no Evidence, — no Probability arise from Tradition at all? If in an Hundred Thousand Removes



Removes the Probability would be lost entirely; Must it likewise be lost in the Third or Fourth Remove? And yet this is perhaps the Case with reference to the Gospel Tradition: Possibly some of the Copies still remaining may have been taken from the very Originals themselves: If not, yet it is not at all unlikely but they may have been Copies of Copies: Or, if we should suppose them to have been taken at a much greater Remove from the Originals, yet still Corruptions are not so easily introduc'd, where numerous Copies are dispers'd: To which may be added, that these must easily betray or correct one another, in case of Corruption. So that, with regard to the Gospel, I am persuaded, notwithstanding the gradual Decrease of Evidence in traditional Propositions, the Decrease is so very little, that it may, like the infinitely small Quantities in Mathematicks, be rejected, as making no considerable Difference in the Point at all.

Upon the whole of what our Author hath advanc'd upon the Evidence of our traditional Revelation, as compar'd with the Evidence of his absolutely perfect Law of Nature, we must observe, that the one may be clear'd up to the Satisfaction of any impartial Person, with much greater Ease and Certainty than the other; That the Evidence we insist on, tho' not demonstrative, is yet the highest which the Nature of the Thing will

admit of; is what cannot be resisted without throwing up all Evidence of distant Facts; and, which is more, without disputing all Matters to which we ourselves were not Witnesses. He who can hold out here, may equally hold out against Demonstration itself. His Incredulity is not owing to the Want of Evidence, but of a Disposition to receive it.

The next Course of Arguing by which our Author would prove, That a proper Rule of Life is more easily discoverable by every Man in the Use of his Reason, than a traditional Revelation can make it, amounts to this; That the very Sense and Meaning of the Revelation itself cannot be fix'd and ascertain'd. What he advances to this Purpose, may be reduc'd to the following Heads:

1. That Words in any one Language are scarce possible to be translated into another; because, excepting Matters which immediately strike the Senses, the Words of one Language are not exactly answer'd by those in another. 2. Because the hyperbolical, parabolical, mystical, allegorical, and typical Ways of Expression familiar to Persons in the Eastern Parts, are entirely disagreeable to the Usage of other Nations. And, 3. Because we want such an accurate Knowledge of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Antients, as will enable us to understand their Writings.

I must,



I must, before I proceed farther, take Notice of one Thing, which properly belongs to this Head of Objections; and which, tho' it be not distinctly insisted on in this Place, is yet, in several others, urg'd with Confidence: It is this; That whatever the Language be in which a traditional Religion is express'd, if it be not a universal Language, it must lay a great Part of Mankind under a Necessity of taking their Religion on the Authority of the Translators.

But will the Gentleman say, we can have no sufficient Assurance that a Translation of any Book is made faithfully, if we are not acquainted with the Original Language, or have not examin'd it nicely? On this Foot, to what Purpose are any Translations ever made at all? Or can we entertain any just Suspicions concerning the Faithfulness of the Version, whilst it passes uncontradicted by Men of eminent Skill in Criticism, and both able and willing to detect the Cheat, if any such be attempted? Nay, more, whilst there are Men, no Friends to the Religion itself, or the Persons who embrace it, who would be forward enough to expose such Practices, and could not but gain singular Advantages by informing the World, that the Religion taught, differs vastly from that which is said to have been reveal'd originally? He who is capable, after all this, of entertaining Doubts concerning the general



Faithfulness of the Translation, may doubt or dispute any Thing.

However, admitting that if Translations may be made faithfully, there may be sufficient Assurance that they are so made; yet What if no Translations whatsoever can be exact? Our Author affirms they cannot: and that, for this Reason, amongst others, That the Words in any one Language, excepting Matters which immediately strike the Senses, are not exactly answer'd by Words in another.

What is affirm'd here, is void of the very Shew of Truth; and every one who knows any thing of different Languages can contradict him. Yet, supposing it true, I must observe to him, There is no manner of Occasion that Translations should be verbal, or answer the Original exactly Word for Word. What is express'd in one Language by one Word, may be answer'd in another Language by many Words: All the Ideas intended to be convey'd, may, in this way, be preserv'd; and the Translation be entirely just, tho' it should be not literal.

But, 2. The Easterns, it seems, were much given to a bold and figurative Way of Writing: "They affected hyperbolical, paradoxical, mystical, allegorical, and typical Ways of Expressing themselves, as opposite to the Usage in other Parts, as East is to the West."

I wish

I wish our Author, when he urg'd this Objection, had drawn it out at full Length, and told us plainly how much he design'd should be concluded from it. Would he have us infer, that the Writings of the Easterns must therefore be absolutely unintelligible? Doth he think they were incapable of being understood by the Easterns themselves, and in those very Times in which they were compos'd? This, surely, will not be asserted, if this Kind of Writing was then usual and familiar to them. Or, Doth he intend no more than this, That the Difference between the Eastern Way of Writing in those early Times, and the Manner of Expression now in Use with us, is so great, that no Man doth, or can understand what is meant? If this be what he intends, I must observe, That Difficulties will sometimes arise from such a bold and figurative Way of Expression; but at the same time I must contend, and appeal to all the Learned for the Truth of what I maintain, That the general Meaning even of these figurative Writings is capable of being understood by the Skilful; And if it may be understood, then it must be capable of being truly render'd in modern Language. Difficulties, I must own, will arise as to the full Meaning and Import of particular Expressions: But then Difficulties are not Impossibilities. Even such Expressions may be understood, and,



for the most part, have been understood, and rightly explain'd, by some one or other. And if Men have not equally succeeded in every Thing of this Kind, yet 'tis sufficient that the main Drift and Design of the Writing is intelligible. This may answer the full Purpose of the Work ; and then we need not concern our selves any farther.

The Objection before us is, I know, pointed at the Sacred Writings : In reference to which, and farther to shew the Weakness of the Objection, we may observe, That these Writings are of different Kinds, and relate to different Matters. Some of them are Prophetical ; Some of them Historical ; Some Poetical ; Some Doctrinal ; and Some Preceptive : And again, amongst these, Some had a more immediate, if not a sole Regard to the Persons who liv'd in these more early Ages, as Others have a general Reference to all Men in all Ages.

That the Prophetical Parts should be frequently express'd in Figures, and in such a Manner as not to be understood distinctly even by Persons who liv'd in those early Times, ought not to be wonder'd at ; The very Nature of the Thing might sometimes require it should be so. And tho' the Accomplishment of those Predictions clear'd Things up to those who liv'd when the Predictions were accomplish'd, yet at this Distance of Time the Notice of several Mat-  
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ters may be lost, useful for the explaining them. Should this prove the Case, (as in some Instances it hath prov'd), I cannot see what Hurt arises. Many Prophecies are sufficiently clear; and enough appears to confirm our Faith in the great Articles supported by them.

The Style of the Historical Parts is vastly different from that of the Prophetical. This, for the most Part, is plain and simple; and no great Matters of Difficulty can arise about it. Or, if there did, yet, as the main End of Revelation is to give us a Scheme of Virtue and Religion, and to enforce it on us in the most effectual Manner, all Objections arising from Difficulties in the Historical Style are of no Moment. For, the Question at present is, Whether a Reveal'd Rule of Life can be, or in Fact hath been deliver'd in such a Manner as to be plain and intelligible to those Persons for whom it was intended.

To pass on; Other Parts of Scripture are Poetical, in which the Style, from the very Nature of the Thing, must be bold and figurative; and, consequently, more remote from ordinary Apprehensions than the simple and common Forms of speaking. Yet, will any one maintain, that the Poetical Writings of the Ancients cannot be understood? Or, if they may, that they cannot be render'd truly in the Translation? But, if this cannot be affirm'd, then, whatever Pains it  
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may cost the Translators to render such Writings in modern Language, yet, when they are once truly render'd, the main Difficulties are over. Besides, that these Difficulties themselves rather regard the Beauty and Elegance of the Expression, than the principal Matters intended to be represented.

As to the Doctrinal and Preceptive Parts I must affirm, 1. From the Nature of the Thing, that, as such Matters are capable of being represented clearly, so if the Supreme Being should ever vouchsafe us a Revelation about them, such would be set forth to us in a clear and intelligible Manner: For, no wise Law-giver ever chuses to give us his Laws in Riddles. And, 2. That this hath prov'd so in Fact, with Reference to those Matters which are delivered in Holy Scripture. This I shall content myself with affirming here, since the Point hath been so often clear'd in our Disputes with the Papists.

Let our Author then talk, with as much Confidence as he pleases, of the hyperbolical, parabolical, mystical, allegorical, and typical Ways of Expression, familiar to the Easterns, yet, if these are capable of being understood by others, in any distant Age, they must be capable of being render'd in modern Language and modern Terms. And the Objection is still of less Moment, if Things express'd in this Way are Matters in which our Faith and Practice are not concern'd; —

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Matters which were proper to those Times, when they might be, and easily were understood; Lastly, Matters which rather try the Abilities of the Curious, than affect the Conduct of ordinary Believers. Such kind of Objections our Author himself would disallow in any other Case than ours.

But, 3. It is objected against traditional Revelation, That we want such an accurate Knowledge of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Ancients, as will enable us to understand their Writings rightly.

As far as Things relate merely to Doctrines or Precepts, I cannot by any Means see how such an accurate Knowledge of ancient Manners, Customs, &c. can be necessary. Truths which concern Men in all Ages, and Precepts which have the same Reference to all Men, in whatever Times they live, are not of such a Nature as to depend on the peculiar Manners or Customs of any Age. I do in no wise deny, but it is possible to express Matters with such a View to the Customs peculiar to a certain Time, that the right Apprehension of them shall be exceedingly difficult in future Ages. But I do, and must deny, that this is absolutely necessary and unavoidable: And consequently, this is no manner of Objection against an ancient traditional Religion, merely as such. Moral Truths have been set forth to us with the utmost Clearness, by the ancient Philosophers; I mean, the Sense and Import



port of their Precepts hath been clear, whatever Judgment we may be forced to pass on those Reasonings by which they supported them. And what hath been so clearly express'd by some, may be as plainly represented by others.

There are indeed Two or Three Things, especially in ancient Writings, which may have a Reference to the Customs, &c. of those Ages, and prove in a great measure inexplicable without a Skill that Way; viz. Precepts given with a special View to the Circumstances of those Times, tho' they may not possibly be unserviceable in other Times: Reasonings intended to draw Men to assent to certain Matters, or to comply with certain Precepts, built on some preceding Notions or Practices of that People: To which may be added, Occasional Directions, built on something either proper to the Person to whom they are given, or, at least, to that Place and Age.

In all these, I conceive, we are not much concern'd. What, tho' we should not be able to say, What might be the Occasion of every Precept in the Jewish Law; to what Heathen Usage it was oppos'd; or what Failing amongst the Jews it guarded against? Doth it follow from hence, that we know not the very Sense and Meaning of the Precept? What tho' we cannot make out clearly all the Reasonings of *St. Paul* in his Epistles?

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— Reasonings, no doubt, clear and full to those Persons for whom they were design'd ; Is the Point concluded Therefore obscure ? May not the Proposition he would inculcate be clear enough, tho' we should not comprehend the Force of those Arguings whereby he combated the Prejudices of the Jews against it ? And will not the Conclusion subsist on the Authority of the Apostle, tho' we should not be able to make out exactly every Step in the Apostle's Argument ? Once more ; What tho' we should not understand the Occasions of those Times, nor every particular Circumstance relating to Men who then liv'd, so perfectly, as to account for every Passage in ancient Writings ? Will it follow, that we cannot have any general and competent Knowledge of them at all ? — That we cannot understand any thing which is affirm'd or taught in them ; — That we cannot learn from them those important Truths, or Precepts, which it was the Design of these Writings to record for common Use ? There is no debating with Persons who will seriously maintain such extravagant Things as these.

Upon the whole ; If God may reveal himself to us by a direct Action upon Men's Minds, of which He can give them as clear a Sense as they have of their own Existence : If such a Revelation made directly and immediately to one, or a few Persons, may be communicated by them to others, and confirm'd



firm'd as the Word of God by undoubted Proofs of Divine Authority, (as surely this is in the Nature of Things possible at least): If a Revelation thus made and publish'd may be recorded in Writing, and deliver'd down from one to another in a traditionary Way: If there may be good Evidence that this traditionary Revelation hath been convey'd down in sufficient Purity: If the Sense and Meaning of such a Writing may be sufficiently understood and explain'd, as to all the great Ends intended to be serv'd by it: And, Lastly, If Men, who are incapable of entering far into abstruse and metaphysical Reasonings, and consequently cannot receive a moral or religious Rule on the mere Foot of Natural Reason, may yet have Evidence sufficient to convince them, that this traditionary Revelation is the genuine Will of God, and what the Meaning and Import of it is; then, I conceive, the Point contended for in this Chapter is abundantly supported. I shall therefore pass on to such other Questions as naturally follow, and will receive Light from the foregoing Observations.





# C H A P. VII.

*Whether a Revelation be not expedient,  
in order to a more easy, more per-  
fect, and more general Knowledge of  
the Rule of Life.*



THE greatest Part of what hath  
been offer'd hitherto is prepara-  
tory to this important Question;  
on the right Decision of which  
the Credit of our whole Religion  
doth in a great Degree depend. And I have  
been the more full and particular on the fore-  
going Heads, purely with a View to this.  
Our Author sees full well of what Moment  
the Points formerly discuss'd must be; other-  
wise he would not have insisted on them so  
strenuously; He would not have repeated  
Matters with relation to them so frequently;  
He would not have endeavour'd to make  
good his own Side of these several Questions  
with so much Art and Subtlety. He knew  
what he was doing; and that, upon the  
Foot he would have Revelation put, it could  
not possibly maintain itself. If

If the Law or Religion of Nature were absolutely perfect ; If it were immutable in that Sense in which he contends it is ; If it were perfectly and easily discoverable by every Man, even by those of the meanest Capacities ; If, Lastly, it were more perfectly and more easily discoverable by them in the Use of Reason, than either the Proof or Meaning of a Revelation can be, then the Conclusion he would obtrude on us would be certain and unquestionable : A Revelation would then be superfluous ; it could serve no End or Purpose ; would be utterly unworthy of God, and consequently what we could not expect, and ought not to admit of : For this is most certain, that a perfectly Wise Being cannot act in vain.

On the other hand, If the Law or Religion of Nature, when rightly understood, be not absolutely perfect ; If it be not immutable in the Sense by him contended for ; If a proper Rule of Life be not discoverable by every one perfectly, and with Ease ; and if it be not discoverable in greater Perfection, and with greater Ease, than the Evidence and Meaning of a Revelation can be ; — then we may claim the Liberty of making these Conclusions : God may give us a Law more perfect than the Law of Nature, strictly so call'd, is ; He may, without contradicting that Law, superadd to it some Particulars ; He may teach us the proper

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proper Rule of Life, in a Way which shall give us a more full, clear, and easy View of it, than we could have gain'd in the mere Use of our Reason ; And, Lastly, He may order Matters so, that the Meaning and Evidence even of a traditional Revelation, shall be more clear and easy to us, than a moral Rule would be in the mere Exercise of our natural Faculties. If therefore the Matters before insisted on by me, are prov'd, (as I hope they have been), then a Revelation is not only possible, and consistent with the Divine Attributes, but, on our Part, highly desirable : And the Wishes of some of the wisest Heathens, upon a strict View of the Condition of human Nature, are a farther Confirmation of our Sentiments on this Head.

To this may be added, That this is not only desirable, (as indeed every Kind of Good is, and must be), but likewise upon considering that we are moral Beings, originally capable of great moral Perfection, and intended for it by our wise Creator, it will appear, that this is highly fitting and proper ; and what we might expect would, one time or other, be given us, when the giving it should fall in with the general Government, and be consistent with the grand Scheme of Things. This is the Point which I shall distinctly pursue in this Chapter, as far as it relates to the more easy, more perfect, and more general Knowledge of the Rule of Life ;

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which being dispatch'd, I shall hereafter endeavour to evince the Expediency of a Revelation to enforce the general and uniform Observance of this Rule.

I shall not repeat at large what I have occasionally noted heretofore concerning the Possibility of Revelation. It will appear at first sight, that God may communicate his Will to us, by immediate Action, upon our Minds, with much greater Clearness and Certainty, than any one Man can convey his Sentiments to another, either by Words or Actions. But whether this be fit and proper to be done, is another Question; and will be determin'd, by enquiring, Whether the Effect of a Revelation can be as well obtain'd in the ordinary Measures of Proceeding? If it may, a Revelation will be superfluous; And we may argue against the Probability of any Thing in that Kind, just as Mr. *Locke* did against Innate Ideas. He alledg'd, That God hath given us natural Faculties, by which all our several Ideas of Sensation and Reflexion may be gain'd: It must therefore be superfluous and unaccountable, to imprint these on us in our original Constitution, for the Acquisition of which we have natural Faculties given us. In like manner, If a proper Rule of Life be as easily and perfectly discoverable by the Use of our Reason, as it can be by extraordinary Revelation, Then such an  
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extraordinary Revelation must be needless. On the other hand, If this be neither perfectly nor easily discoverable by any one, nor, in any considerable Measure, discoverable by most, in the ordinary Way, Then an extraordinary Information must be of high Importance; It must concern us, as much as it does to be fully inform'd of these Matters at all: For, nothing can be clearer than this, If we are concern'd to have any full Information of these Matters; and if this Information is not to be had in the ordinary Way; Then we are equally concern'd to have it given us in a Way extraordinary.

But, let me not be misunderstood here. When I affirm, that Men are concern'd to have an extraordinary Information of the Rule of Life, I mean, that such an Information will be of vast Use and Importance to us. I would not be thought in anywise to affirm, that such an Information is absolutely necessary, or that Divine Justice is concern'd in giving it. This Attribute will be clear'd entirely from hence, That Men are accountable for their Actions, no farther than their Capacities of Knowledge, and Powers of Acting reach. In all those Instances therefore, in which Men are left entirely to their natural Reason, they cannot be censurable whilst they do their best. A Revelation indeed would be highly useful,



and give them Advantages which cannot be had any other way ; It would enable them to do more Good to others, and to purchase a greater Happiness to themselves. But then we must remember, that Justice is not concern'd in the Distribution of Favours, but the rendering what is due. If therefore a Revelation, in the present Case, be not strictly and properly a Debt, Then the Vouchsafing, or the With-holding it, as not being the Concern of Justice, must be referr'd to some other of The Divine Attributes.

Upon this View of the Matter, we must consider Revelation as an Instance of Favour; as something which, tho' it would conduce highly to our moral Perfection, yet could not be demanded as a Right : And therefore we must Enquire, Whether, upon this Foot, it will appear, that it was proper for God to grant it, and for us to expect it. To this Purpose, I shall consider,

1. The Condition of the wiser and better Part of Mankind ; And, 2. — of those in lower Rank, and of meaner Abilities. Only before I proceed, this ought to be noted, That, in considering the State and Condition of Mankind, I have a View to That State only in which they subsist at present, or in which they have been for more than Three Thousand Years past. This, probably, may have been very different from what it was before ; and consequently, those



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those Arguments which may shew the Expediency of a Revelation in these Circumstances, may not equally conclude for vouchsafing the same in the more early Ages.

In reference to the *former*, I must allow, That a proper Rule of Life may be discover'd in a good Degree. The Remains of several ancient Writers on the Subject of Morals, shew a great Reach this Way: And no doubt, but in this, as well as other Parts of Philosophy, Abundance may be done, if Men are furnish'd with competent Abilities, favour'd with sufficient Opportunities, and willing to apply themselves with Care: Much, I say, may be done under these Circumstances, because much hath been done in Fact. Yet it must be confess'd withal, That 'tis difficult to say exactly, how far mere uninstructed Reason might have carry'd Men. Somewhat must be abated in the Argument drawn from Fact, and in Proof how much may be done this Way, from considering what hath been done by Heathens, because we cannot be certain what Assurances these very Writers themselves borrow'd from Revelation. To say Nothing here, of some Revelation probably made to the first Man, of a Rule of Morals, which might, notwithstanding the Corruptions which gradually crept in, supply noble Hints; This is remarkable, That the Scheme of Morals contain'd in the Old Testament, is vastly older than any



Writings of the Heathen Philosophers. Whether these might not be consulted by those inquisitive Men, who omitted scarce any Means of Instruction in their Power; or, Whether many of the more important Precepts might not be propagated by the Jews dispers'd in different Parts of the World, cannot be determined with absolute Certainty. But, if either of these hath prov'd the Case, then the Precepts of Philosophers have not been so much their own Growth, as some Men would persuade us. They have been either directly taken from Revelation, or at least such Hints have been drawn from thence, as they have improv'd afterwards by the Force of Parts and Application. This, I say, probably hath been, or possibly may have been the Case.

However, as we are not able to determine this Point with Certainty, Let us suppose the utmost which our Adversaries can demand; Let us suppose that the Philosophers wrought every Thing out of their own Stock: Yet still a Revelation would have been exceedingly useful even to such Great Men as these, as well to render their Scheme of Morals more perfect and compleat, as to discover it with greater Readiness.

Had the Scripture Morality been receiv'd by them as a Divine Revelation, could they possibly have err'd from Truth, as we frequently find they did? Could they have

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taught certain Things as Virtues, or at least as excusable, which are vicious in a very high Degree, and some of them even monstrous? Could they have been guilty of such Mistakes with Regard to our Conduct towards the Supreme Being? Could they have differ'd so much from one another about the social Duties; or have given us such lame Instructions in reference to ourselves? Or, if we should suppose that every Virtue of higher Moment, and more general Concern, was really taught by some one or other, (which I will not affirm positively was not the Case); yet how came it to pass that the same was not equally taught by all? The Case seems to be plain enough: All had not equal Abilities to discover Truth; or they were not equally capable of apprehending the Ground of those Discoveries which were made by others; or, they were not equally dispos'd to attend and consider, and consequently to enter into the Reasonings of their Predecessors: Or, if in some Points they might easily distinguish between Truth and Falshood; yet Prejudice, Passion, and the like, prevented their judging rightly concerning other Matters: They had been us'd to think otherwise; and therefore could not discern the Force even of plain Arguments on that Side of the Question they disliked.



This hath been, and always will be the Case, where Men have nothing left to trust to but themselves. But would it have been so, had Men enjoy'd and acknowledg'd a Revelation? No, certainly: On this Supposition, an unerring Rule would have been before them: Persons of superior Parts and Sagacity would probably have trac'd most Precepts up to their original Principles: Or, if they should be incapable of this, yet the Authority of the Revelation must have overrul'd their Doubts: If corrupt Nature should have bias'd them another Way, and turn'd them out of the Paths of Obedience, yet the Rule would have still remain'd: The Scheme of Morality would have been still the same; and acknowledg'd even by those Persons who car'd not to comply with it. Such then are the Advantages of a Divine Revelation, with regard to Persons of superior Rank and Abilities.

But there is another Thing behind, which may shew the Usefulness of Revelation, even supposing that Men were capable of making the full Discovery of a moral Rule on the Foot of Reason; and that is, it would have render'd such a Discovery more plain and easy, and have led Men into just Notions of Things with much greater Quickness and Dispatch.

I think this is too clear to admit Dispute, where the Revelation is Original and Immediate:

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diate : For to assert the contrary, would be the same as to maintain, That 'tis easier to pursue a Demonstration thro' a long Series of Proofs, than 'tis to perceive that Self-evident Principle on which it must at last be founded. I shall therefore, without enlarging on a Point so clear, chuse rather to observe somewhat concerning Traditional Revelation.

I have noted in my last Chapter, That notwithstanding all the Disadvantages which may be suppos'd to attend a traditional Evidence, yet Proof of that Kind may be sufficient to determine any reasonable and impartial Man ; I have noted farther, That such Evidence may be judg'd of by Men of ordinary Abilities ; and that Persons of that Character are more capable of determining concerning Facts, than concerning abstract and perplex'd Reasonings. The Objection therefore against the traditional Revelation of a proper Rule of Life, built on This, that 'tis easier to fix this Rule on the Foot of Reason, than to judge concerning the Evidence of a traditional Revelation, hath no Force at all.

To this I shall beg Leave to add here, That Revelation hath one special Advantage, *viz.* That by Settling this One Point, every Thing else is settled of Course. As the Divine Authority is supreme, it must overrule every Objection : And therefore, when we are once secure that any Particular is commanded by God, we have nothing left

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us but to obey. On what Foot is it, I would desire to know, that we are, strictly speaking, oblig'd to act agreeably to the Rules of Reason, and to pursue those Things which appear to be fit and proper? Is it not, because by doing so, we obey the Will of God? For, if God's Will were entirely out of Question, however we might be concern'd on several Occasions to act in Point of Prudence, yet we could not be properly oblig'd; Nothing would, in such a Case, be Matter of strict Duty. If this be true, then the Exercise of our natural Reason is but one Way in which the Will of God is discoverable; and consequently, if there be any other Method, in which it may be discover'd with greater Ease, this Method will have a vast Advantage over the other.

Now the Difference between them lies in this; He who builds merely on human Reason, must have a distinct Proof of every Article in Morality: He must trace every Thing back to its first Principles: And tho' we should allow, that all moral Precepts are resolvable at last into one or two general Rules, which Rules may be obvious enough; yet 'tis no such easy matter to carry Things back so far: It will require much Time, and great Attention. On the other hand, by evincing the Revelation, the Whole is prov'd at once; Every Precept contain'd in it will be a Part of our Duty; We need not

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enquire into the natural Ground and Reason of the Precept: God's Will must be the Rule of our Actions; which being once fix'd this Way, we have nothing left but to examine the Record, and to act agreeably. In short, a Revelation, with regard to the Rule of Life, is, when compar'd with a particular Investigation of every Precept, much the same as a general Demonstration in Mathematicks, compar'd with the particular Demonstrations of each Case; it sets the whole before us at once, and saves us the Trouble of minute and particular Enquiries.

Having thus offer'd some Observations on the Usefulness of a Revelation to the wiser and better-instructed Part of Mankind, I shall now, in the *second* Place, consider its Usefulness with respect to Persons of lower Rank, and meaner Abilities.

Every Thing which hath been alledg'd above, will equally conclude here; For most certainly, if Advantages may be deriv'd from hence, even to Persons of the best Capacity, the same, or rather greater, must arise to those of lower Sense and meaner Attainments. Such Persons (as I have had Occasion to observe frequently) cannot carry Matters very far on the Foot of Reason: And therefore, to talk as if all Men were equally capable of doing all Things, is to treat human Nature differently from what it can  
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in Fact admit of. It supposes that Men are really more perfect than they are; and is the very same Absurdity; as it would be to measure the Abilities of Brutes by the Abilities of Men.

If this be the Case, then How will the Gentleman inculcate his Scheme of Morality, (however perfect we should suppose it), on the Generality of Mankind? Not, I presume, in the Way of human Terror; This will be, in his Account of Things, Persecution. And besides, if the Order of the World should require, that the Precepts of Morality be enforc'd by the Execution of Penalties, yet it should be remember'd, that this rather serves to guard the Good, than entirely to reclaim the Vicious. A Man may be very bad in himself notwithstanding his outward Actions are restrain'd: The inward Principle may still remain untouch'd, and ready to betray itself as often as Men can act with Safety; as often as they can either conceal their Crimes, or bribe Justice, or evade, or resist it.

It remains that we enquire, What can be done by Instruction or Authority: These, we allow, are of some Consequence; But if, after all, they shall be found defective, and insufficient for the Purpose before us, we must carry the Matter farther.

Then let us see, What may be done on the Foot of Instruction. This doubtless



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may be serviceable : It may suggest Things which would not otherwise have been thought of : And Mens Ideas may be so order'd this way, that Conclusions shall appear in a very strong Light, which would not have been discern'd without such Assistance. This is seen in the several other Sciences, or Arts of Life ; and therefore might reasonably be expected in the present Case likewise.

Yet, whencesoever it hath come to pass, the great and important Affair of Morality hath been neglected exceedingly. The Priests amongst the *Gentiles* concern'd themselves only about the Forms of Worship, which they attended with Care enough ; whilst the proper Rule of Life was untouch'd by them ; and the lower Part of the World, who most needed Assistance, were left to search out their Duty in such ways as they could find.

It must not indeed be deny'd, but there have been in several Ages some Persons of a noble Temper ; Men who have pursued this great Subject with Diligence, and erected Schools, in which they endeavour'd to communicate their Discoveries. Something might be expected from hence. However, it is observable, that as there were a few Persons only who undertook this Work, so the Effects must be confin'd within narrow Bounds. Their Instructions were useful to their Scholars ; But what could this avail  
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others who wanted the Advantage? The Method, however excellent in itself, was of little Service, whilst not one in a Thousand could reap any Profit from it.

But perhaps it will be said, The present Question doth not relate to the Instruction of former Times: This may have been, and probably hath been, too much neglected. This was the Fault of Men, and doth not argue any Defects in the Method. But may not Things be put on a better Foot? May not the good Effects of Instruction be render'd more general under proper Regulations? And the Cause of Virtue be sufficiently provided for, if due Care be taken? Let us suppose this done: Then the Point will rest on the Sufficiency of the several Instructors, and the Capacity, Leisure, and other Qualifications of the Persons to be instructed.

The Instructors must proceed in the Way of Reason; must point out the Natures of Things, the Relations they have to one another, and the moral Precepts which will arise from thence. In these Persons therefore it must be requir'd, that they have not only a full View of such Matters, but likewise the Art of communicating their Knowledge, and of representing it in a proper Light to others. Yet is this really the Talent of every Man, who hath good Sense enough to order his own Searches? Is every one who may be capable of Learning, capable

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ble likewise of Teaching; — of expressing himself clearly; and of adapting himself to the Understanding of his Hearers? It is very observable, that Men who possess the greatest Share of Learning themselves, are not always the most happy in shewing it. Those who see the Agreement or Disagreement of Ideas, discern it sometimes at such a Distance, as others, who have a less quick Sense of Matters, could never have discern'd it at all. These pass over many of the intermediate Ideas as unnecessary to be distinctly noted; and therefore, when they come to explain Things to Persons of inferior Abilities, are perfectly unintelligible.

Or, if this should not prove the Case; If the Teacher should order his Thoughts in the most regular Way, and dispose Things so as will be most apt to beget a right Sense in the Hearer; yet still Ideas cannot be convey'd immediately from one Man to another: They must be expressed and represented by Words. This draws on another Thing, and shews the Necessity of a Skill in Language. Yet is This a Talent, which every one possesses in that Degree of Perfection, which may enable him to convey his Thoughts Clearly and with Readiness?

To this may be added farther, That such a Teacher ought to have a good Insight into human Nature; I mean, not only a general View of the Genius and Temper of Mankind,



kind, but likewise some Acquaintance with the particular Abilities, Ways of Thinking, Constitutions and Inclinations of his several Hearers. Without this, his best Instructions must many times miscarry. For, there is a considerable Difference between speculative Teaching, and moral. In the former, where no Passions are concern'd, plain Reasons, when laid in a proper Order, and express'd in fitting Language, may prevail: But, in moral Matters, where Men labour, perhaps, under strong Prejudices, and are embarrass'd by inward Passions, many Difficulties will arise. In this Case the skilful Teacher will find himself concern'd to adapt his very Reasons to the Temper and Condition of the Person he would instruct; to express them in such a Manner, and to set them in such a Light as shall give them the greatest Weight with him; shall create Attention; shall obviate Prejudices; shall engage his Liking; and, at length, gain his Assent. All these several Qualifications, as well as others which might be insisted on, are necessary on the Part of that Instructor, who would endeavour, on the mere Foot of Reason, to argue Men into their Duty.

Yet all this will avail Nothing, unless the Hearers likewise are properly dispos'd to be instructed. Something surely is needful on their Part; and without which every Thing the Teacher can offer must be ineffectual.

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Now the First which occurs is This; They must be ready and willing to learn. Instruction cannot be forc'd on any Man. He may, if he pleases, shut his Eyes, and refuse to see: which if he should do, Objects will present themselves in vain.

It is requisite, in the next Place, that the Learner be attentive, diligent, and constant. Without somewhat of Attention, nothing will be perceiv'd but first and self-evident Truths; Without Diligence there is no carrying on an Enquiry thro' a great Variety of Particulars: And, without Constancy, all those Conclusions which demand repeated Pains, and Consideration, must escape him.

Let us suppose, however, (tho' it doth not prove the Case frequently,) that Men are as attentive, diligent, and constant as You please; yet forasmuch as, in the present Way, every Thing must be done by dint of Reason, there is one Thing farther necessary, *viz.* That Men have a Sufficiency of Parts and Abilities. It is difficult to say how far Men are furnish'd in this respect, by Nature; and what might have been built on the native Stock, if every Thing had been rightly order'd in the Beginning. Thus much, however, will be allow'd me here, That all Men are not upon an exact Level; that Some have a much greater natural Discernment, and quicker Use of their reasoning Faculties, than others have; and



consequently, are capable of those Improvements, which cannot be attain'd by others with their utmost Care. But however the Matter relating to Mens original Parts shall prove, it is certain, that in every Part of Life, Mens Capacities will be proportion'd to the State and Condition in which they have liv'd, and the Use they have made of their Faculties. Those who have been train'd up in an advantageous Manner, may be capable of great Things; whilst those, who have either been neglected, or had a wrong Turn given them, may lose their very natural Vigour. It happens in some sort to the Mind as to the Body: Its Powers are capable, by different Management, of being heighten'd or impair'd to almost any Degree assignable; and the Man shall, on these Accounts, act either vastly above, or as exceedingly beneath himself.

These Things being premis'd, I must observe, that, in order to carry Matters of Morality to any considerable Height on the mere Foot of Instruction, we must suppose that the Persons to be instructed have not only an original Fund of Parts, but likewise that Nothing hath been lost thro' Negligence or Mismanagement: We must suppose that the Generality of Men have been exercis'd in a rational Way, and train'd up to argue, and collect a Truth from a long Train of Inferences. Without this it will be vain to

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deal with them in the present Method: For Arguments have no Manner of Force, where Men want Sense and Capacity to understand them.

To this let me add, that forasmuch as many Conclusions of a moral Kind are difficult to be made out in a tedious Course of Reasoning, it is requisite that the Persons to be taught this Way should have Leisure and Opportunity for such Researches. For, the Abilities of Men can signify little, if Business of another Kind shall take up their Time; if the necessary Employments of Life shall divert them; and prevent their Application to those Matters, to which they may be equal as to Capacity, and led by Inclination.

Now, if it cannot be expected that there should be a competent Number of Instructors, who have a full View of moral Matters: If those who have such a View may yet be unhappy in representing Things; may want either Propriety of Method, or Clearness of Expression, or the right Manner of addressing themselves to the Capacities and Tempers of Men: — And, if the Persons to be instructed shall really prove (what we find the Generality of Mankind are in Fact) backward to learn, inattentive, lazy, inconstant: If, besides this, they shall want the Capacity for close Reasoning, whether from a Defect of natural Parts, or of a

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proper Education; or be so fully employ'd in the common Affairs of Life, as to have no Leisure for deep Study and Reflection; If any, and much more, if all these Cases happen frequently, I may conclude with Safety, that the Method of Instruction will be of itself insufficient to inculcate a compleat Rule of Morality.

I am aware of an Objection which may be thought to arise here. It may be said, If there be any Force in this Kind of Arguing, it will equally conclude against the Sufficiency of Christian Instruction, as that which is purely Moral; against inculcating Christian Duties on Christian Principles, as Moral Duties on the Principles of Human Reason; and consequently, against the Usefulness of the Christian Priesthood itself.

Upon which it should be observ'd, That I do by no means affirm, No Good whatsoever can be done this Way: I am far from maintaining, that Instruction must be absolutely useless, and consequently, to be laid aside entirely. Whilst Men had Nothing else to depend on, they were concern'd to make the most of This; and to Something of this Kind, to domestick Institution principally was it owing, that there were any Footsteps of Virtue and Religion in the World. All that I have asserted in the foregoing Argument is only This; That the present Method, however serviceable it may be in some



some respects, must be insufficient to inculcate a perfect and compleat System of Morality; That there are frequently such Defects on the Part both of the Teacher and the Learner, as must render this Method ineffectual: And therefore, since the Generality of Mankind are incapable of learning a proper Rule of Life this Way, they may wish and hope for it in some other.

A Divine Revelation is the Method I have now in View. This, we affirm, God hath been pleas'd to grant us in Fact: Yet, notwithstanding this, the Usefulness of Instruction is by no means superseded. If this was in a great measure ineffectual before, because many Persons are incapable of being taught in the Way of Argument; yet, since God hath been pleas'd to declare his Will, the State of Things is alter'd. On the present Foot, the Business of an Instructor is vastly different from what it was formerly. The Doctrines and Duties of Religion are now laid down in Scripture; and to be prov'd by the Teacher, not by running Matters back, in an argumentative Way, to the Natures and Reasons of Things, (of which the Generality of the World cannot judge sufficiently), but by shewing that they are contain'd in the Word of God. This makes all other Kinds of Arguing needless: For, Divine Authority is supreme and indisputable.



To return: I have endeavour'd to shew above, That the Cause of Virtue cannot be provided for sufficiently on the mere Foot of human Instruction: For this requires such Advantages, as the greatest Part of Mankind are by no means Masters of. But then it will be said, that those who are incapable of being sufficiently taught this Way, may yet be influenc'd by the mere Credit and Authority of their Teachers; and consequently, that the Reputation of the One may supply all the Defects of the Other.

This may, perhaps, be said, as there is hardly any Thing but some one or other is capable of affirming. Yet, is there any Probability in the Thing? Is it found that Men are so very humble and modest, and willing to give Way to others in those Points in which they are least capable of judging for themselves? Doth not Experience shew, that Men are obstinate and perverse in proportion to their Ignorance; conceited of those very Abilities they want; and apt to presume they know Every Thing, merely for this Reason, that they know Nothing?

Somewhat might be alledg'd to this Purpose, and the Proposal would be plausible enough, if Men thoroughly knew themselves; if they were conscious of their own Defects; and ready to borrow that Assistance from others, which the Circumstances they are placed in make necessary. But, whosoever reckons

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reckons upon this, must betray his Ignorance of the real State of the World. Men, especially the lower Part of them, are conceited, proud, self-will'd, obstinate. How are such Persons as these to be influenced by mere human Authority?

Or, if it should be suppos'd, they might give some Way to others, or take their Word for Matters in which they have no manner of Concern; If they should credit them in their several Professions, or those Arts or Sciences to which they have had no Opportunities of applying themselves; yet we shall find the Case is different, when we come to give them Directions about their own Conduct and Behaviour. Here they will be apt to think No Man whatsoever hath a Right to prescribe to them; that as all Men are by Nature equal, so every Man is to give a Law to Himself; and that each Man for himself is best capable of doing this, not only because he is most sensible of his own Pleasures or Pains, but likewise because he is more interested in the Consequences of his own Actions than any one else can be.

Let us suppose however, that this Difficulty were gotten over; Let us imagine that there were no such Principles of Self-conceit and Perverseness in Mankind, as we see in Fact there are; — that they were conscious of their Defects, and willing to submit themselves to the Directions of wiser Men; How,

I desire to know, will Matters stand on this Supposition?

Why, Things will be manag'd rightly enough, if another Supposition can be justly made, viz. That all these several Instructors shall have the same View of moral Matters, and teach just one and the same Thing. But, if this should not prove the Case, (as it never yet hath prov'd so) then another Difficulty will arise, viz. How to make a proper Choice of the Teacher? Is This to be left to each Man's private Discretion? or is it to be determin'd by some higher Power?

If the later Point be affirm'd, then possibly the Teacher, however he may be qualified for the Work he undertakes, may yet be unacceptable; may lose his Credit and Authority with those he should prescribe to; and consequently, his Precepts may become entirely fruitless and ineffectual. For, this is certain, If the Effect of his Precepts must depend on his Authority, they can have no greater Force than what his Authority gives them; which depending likewise on the Opinion Men have of him, a Regard must be always had to such an Opinion.

On the other Hand; If, to avoid the Inconveniences arising from hence, it be affirm'd, that each Man must chuse for himself, then a new Set of Difficulties will present themselves.

For, I beg to know, whether those who most want Direction, are the fittest Judges of the

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disagree in y<sup>e</sup> most material Parts of it  
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REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 361

Abilities of a Director? Do These Persons know so exactly the Integrity and Skill of those they apply to? Will they not from hence be laid under the unhappy Chance of making as well a bad Choice as a good one? Or rather, will they not be apt to lean too much to the wrong Side, and to chuse the Person rather who favours their Inclinations, than him who would lead them through the difficult Paths of Virtue? This is not only in itself possible, but probable. And, if it should once prove the Case, must be attended with this farther Consequence, that the Errors they are brought into by this Means, must be entirely without Remedy. Where Men give themselves up entirely to Authority, that Authority ought surely to be infallible; because, if it should lead them wrong, they can have Recourse to Nothing farther for Direction. As their Errors are unavoidable, so the Corruptions arising from these Errors must be incurable.

After all, it must be own'd, That our Author is not at all affected by what I have advanc'd here. He does by no means maintain that Human Authority is to be regarded in the present Case: Every Thing is referr'd by him to each Man's own private Sense: And he carries the Matter so far as to exclude the Divine Authority itself. Let us see what he advances to this purpose, p. 186. " If you  
" are to be govern'd by [Revelation,] that  
" supposes



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“supposes you must take every Thing upon  
 “Trust; or merely because it is said by  
 “those for whose Dictates you are to have  
 “an implicit Faith: For, to examine into  
 “the Truth of what they say, is renouncing  
 “their Authority: As, on the contrary, if  
 “Men are to be govern’d by their Reason,  
 “they are not to admit any Thing farther  
 “than as they see it reasonable. To sup-  
 “pose both consistent, is to suppose it con-  
 “sistent to take and not to take Things on  
 “Trust. To receive Religion on Account  
 “of Authority, supposes, that if the same  
 “Authority promulgated a different Reli-  
 “gion, we should be oblig’d to receive it.  
 “And indeed, it is an odd Jumble, to prove  
 “the Truth of a Book by the Truth of the  
 “Doctrines it contains, and at the same  
 “Time conclude those Doctrines to be true,  
 “because contained in that Book. And  
 “yet, this is a Jumble every Man makes,  
 “who contends for Mens being absolutely  
 “govern’d, both by Reason and Authority.”

\* This is a  
 most confi-  
 dent perver-  
 sion of the  
 author's argu-  
 ment for he has  
 spoken  
 expressly  
 of Revelation as interpreted by Man, in op-  
 position to y<sup>e</sup> Reason of y<sup>e</sup> Persons to whose  
 assent it is proposed.

This Passage must be consider’d; because,  
 if our Author's Position in this Place be true,  
 viz. That we are not to be govern’d by any  
 Authority whatsoever, — no, \* not by  
 the Authority of God himself, all that we  
 can offer concerning the Weakness of human  
 Reason will signify Nothing: It may shew  
 indeed the Unhappiness of Man, but cannot  
 point out the Remedy. This cannot prove  
 that







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that a Revelation is needful, because, on this Supposition, a Revelation must be unserviceable.

Our Author's present Argument is built on a suppos'd Inconsistency between being govern'd by Reason, and being govern'd by Revelation: "If we are govern'd by Revelation, (says he) we must take every Thing upon Trust; — and this supposes, that if the same Authority promulgated a different Religion, we should be oblig'd to receive it." On the other Hand, if we are to be govern'd by our Reason, "we are to examine into the Truth of what [is said] and not to admit any Thing farther than we see it reasonable. To suppose both consistent, is to suppose it consistent to take and not to take Things on Trust."

One Thing I must observe, before I proceed to the distinct Examination of what our Author alledges here, viz. Altho' the Authority concerning which he is here speaking be Divine Authority, ~~the~~ the Authority of Revelation; yet this Writer hath so artfully manag'd Matters in the Progress of his Argument, as possibly to deceive his Readers into a Belief, that he is only contending against absolute Human Authority. "That [i. e. — the being govern'd by Revelation,] supposes you must take every Thing upon Trust; or merely because it is said by those for whose Dictates you are to have an

*It false  
by what  
others say  
is Revelation*

*This is  
merely  
charity  
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being what  
is true  
rule to judge  
of a revelation*

*an writes against, contending all along, that Reason  
Fitness of things is only Rule, it necessarily follows  
his opinion, no Authority can be divine which is  
supported by that Rule, which, supposing it false,  
is not only a mistake*

"implicit Faith." If the Gentleman had express'd himself in this Manner, "Because it is affirm'd by God, who cannot deceive, or be deceived," no Inconveniencies could arise from taking Things on such a Trust. But this would not have serv'd his Purpose. He therefore takes another Way, and endeavours to lead his Readers off from the true Point in Question.

But to the Point itself. In Opposition to our Author's Assertions in this Argument, I shall endeavour to shew,

1. That there neither is, nor possibly can be, any Inconsistency between Reason and Revelation; or, between Things known by human Reason, and taught by Divine Revelation. And

2. That an absolute Submission to both is possible and proper. Under this latter Head I shall clear Matters from the several Difficulties which our Author alledges.

Reason is that natural Faculty, in the Use of which we perceive the Evidence of certain Truths: And Revelation is that extraordinary Act of God, by which certain Truths are impress'd upon us, or manifested to us. Now, there cannot be any more Inconsistency between these, than there can be between real Truths themselves. Truths are the Objects both of Reason and Revelation, which are only different Ways of arriving at the Knowledge of them. Supposing there-  
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REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 385

fore that the Truths themselves are different from each other, as well as the several Ways by which the Knowledge of them is attain'd; Doth it follow, that they must therefore be repugnant? To assert this, is to bid Defiance to common Sense and Reason.

By Reason, here, I mean that which passes under the Name of right Reason, or the Faculty consider'd as properly exercis'd about its proper Object. In such a Case, the Things discover'd by Reason are, and must be true; And the Evidence of the several Truths so discover'd, makes it impossible to withhold Assent. So again, by Revelation, I mean, not merely a pretended Revelation, *ah, hic labor, hoc opus est!* but a true one; some real Manifestation of the Supreme Being, by which he declares his Will and Pleasure to the World. I am oblig'd to be thus cautious, in order to avoid Disputes with reference Either to the Conclusions of an ill-conducted Reason, or a merely nominal and pretended Revelation; and to guard against such Inconsistencies as may be found to arise from an improper Use of these Terms. This being noted, I must affirm, That as every Thing really demonstrable by Reason, and knowable by it, must be true; *\* What Shuff's this Who Geny's* So every Thing really declar'd by God, in the Way of Revelation, must be true likewise. On any other Foot, we must maintain one or both these Points, viz. That God may be deceiv'd himself, or may deceive

*and* *is any thing to do with y<sup>e</sup> real Difficulty, that it is that God has declar'd in the way the phrases of Revelation.*



and mislead his Creatures. But to maintain Either of these, is inconsistent with the most certain Principles of Reason; with those, from which the absolute Wisdom and Rectitude of the Divine Being are evidently concluded. If the Collections therefore of right Reason are certainly true; And if the Discoveries made by Divine Revelation must likewise carry with them certain Truth; And if there can be no real Inconsistency between the several Truths we discover, whatever the Ways may be in which we discover them, then my first Position is sufficiently evinc'd, *viz.* That there is no Inconsistency between Reason and Revelation.

However, That an absolute Submission to both these is in its Nature possible, and upon many Accounts proper, is the main Point I am concern'd about. By an absolute Submission to these, must be understood, an Assent to every Proposition taught by either, and an unreserv'd Obedience to every Precept inculcated by either. I conceive the Possibility of this is evident at first Sight, if there be no Inconsistency between Reason and Revelation; If the Things, each Way discover'd, are either coincident, (as in some Cases they are); or else such as mutually consist with, and even support each other. But if this be possible, I am certain it must, on several Accounts, be reasonable.

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As to our Submission to the Rules of Reason, I can have no Dispute with this Gentleman. We both of us allow, and even contend, That Reason will be heard. The only Question to be debated, is This; Whether Revelation hath a like Claim to our Submission? This is by me affirm'd, and by This Gentleman deny'd; upon what Grounds we shall see immediately.

Yet before I proceed to examine the Objections alledg'd by this Author, give me Leave to ask a few Questions. Doth not Reason it self tell us, That there is a God? — That this God is Wise, Just, and Righteous? — ~~That~~ That if He be so, every Thing which He declares, must be true? And, if it must be true, Doth not this Reason teach us again, That our Assent is due to it? If the Revelation be immediate, i. e. if it be made by an immediate Act of the Supreme Being on the Mind of a Prophet, no Difficulties can possibly arise to such a Person about the Reality of the Revelation; Because God cannot want the Means of making his Will as certainly known by immediate Impression, as by the clearest Demonstrations of Reason. But, where the Revelation is mediate or traditional, the Case may be somewhat different. However, even here, the Grounds or Motives for receiving the Revelation, are rational Grounds or Motives; to be try'd by Reason, and approvable by it.

*is not this a way of arguing that would almost put one out of patience can he dare seriously say of difficulty lies here; is not this y<sup>e</sup> point, and this only, i. e. what it is that God*

*has declar'd, and is not this y<sup>e</sup> only Rule to judge whether or no it is consistent with his moral character, & can any Thing come from him that is consistent?*



If therefore we receive the Revelation itself upon rational Motives of Credibility ; And, if Reason itself teaches us, that what is thus receiv'd as a Divine Revelation, ought to be credited, and submitted to ; then I must conclude, that these Two are far from being unfriendly to each other ; and that Reason itself, duly exercis'd, whilst it conducts us to Revelation, supports us in obeying it. We are convinc'd what is a mediate or traditional Revelation, by the right Use of our rational Faculties : We are convinc'd likewise by the same Reason, that such a Revelation ought to be obey'd entirely ; It follows, that an Obedience to both these, is so far from being inconsistent, that we cannot really obey Reason, without paying an absolute Regard to Revelation.

What our Author objects on this Head, amounts to This ; 1. " That to be govern'd  
" by Revelation, is to take every Thing  
" upon Trust ; and, To be govern'd by  
" Reason, is Not to admit any Thing farther  
" than we see it reasonable. To suppose  
" both these to be consistent, is to suppose  
" it consistent to take, and not to take Things  
" upon Trust."

And, if it be alledg'd, (as he knows we shall alledge), That we are to try, by our Reason, What is, or is not a real Revelation, Then he objects, 2. " That this is  
" an odd Jumble, To prove the Truth of

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a Book by the Truth of the Doctrines it contains; and at the same time to conclude those Doctrines to be true, because contain'd in that Book.

In reference to the former, I must allow, That to be govern'd by Revelation, is to take every Thing upon Trust, concerning which we are satisfy'd that 'tis reveal'd; or, merely because it is said, Not by those [fallible Men] for whose Dictates we have an implicit Faith, — but, by that infal-  
 lible and all-righteous Being, on whom we may depend securely. To take Things upon Trust, in this Case, is not only con-  
 sistent with Reason, but likewise a necessary Conclusion of Reason itself. On the other  
 Hand, To be govern'd by Reason, is not to admit any Thing further than we see it  
 reasonable: This likewise I must allow.

But then, let me observe to this Gentleman, That there are Two Ways in which we may see a Thing to be reasonable; 1. From the  
 internal Evidence of the Thing itself: And  
 here, He who yields to any pretended Au-  
 thority against such internal Evidence, acts  
 unreasonably, no doubt. But it may hap-  
 pen, that the Measure of our Capacities, or  
 the Want of Opportunities, may be such, as  
 shall disqualify us for discovering the Truth  
 from the internal Evidence of the Thing.  
 What, I pray, must be done in such a Case  
 as this? Are we to give Credit to no one?

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and do not that way of arguing necessarily bring one back to y<sup>e</sup> point in my Note (367) that Reason of y<sup>e</sup> thing must direct us, for we can never be satisfied that this or that has been revealed by God, if on examination it is found repugnant to y<sup>e</sup> Conceptions we have formed of him; & some Idea of him antecedent to Revelation must be allow'd, or else we should be involved in eternal Uncertainty —

*\*how is  
best or  
Worst  
applicable  
to an (at  
best) im-  
perishable  
action*

Are we to admit Nothing ; and to act No-thing ? This, surely, will not be maintain'd by any one, who considers the Consequences which must arise from it. In this Case, Reason will teach us to pay such a Deference even to human Authority, as the Skill and Integrity of the Person whom we credit will justify. To do this, must be reasonable and fitting, because it is doing the best we can ; tho' in the particular Prescriptions of this Authority we may not discern the real Fitness of the Thing prescrib'd. But, where the Authority which prescribes to us, is absolutely infallible, and where we own and acknowledge it to be so, there I will not affirm merely that it may be reasonable to submit, but that it is necessary to do so. There Reason will require us to take the Thing upon Trust ; There we shall see that our Assent is reasonable in the highest Degree : And consequently, by believing, in such a Case, we do not admit any Thing farther than we see it reasonable to do so.

Upon the Whole ; To the Inconsistency which our Author alledges between taking Things upon Trust, and not taking them upon Trust, I must reply ; That Reason doth by no means require us, Not to take a Thing upon Trust, where the Authority we depend on is infallible ; and especially, where we have not Reach enough to determine for ourselves on the internal Evidence

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of the Thing. Now, if Reason doth not require this, but the contrary, then our Author's Objection fails, as being built on a Principle in itself groundless and false.

But he adds, "To receive a Religion on Account of Authority, supposes, that if the same Authority promulgated a different Religion, we should be oblig'd to receive it." What then? What Difficulties, I pray, can arise, where we are assur'd, that the Authority is supreme and infallible? None certainly, but what might equally arise, (if any can arise,) from Reason itself. \*To receive a Religion on the

Score of Reason, supposes, that if the same Reason taught a different Religion, we should be oblig'd to receive it. This may be very True, (if the Supposition can be made,) and yet of no Consequence in the Point we are debating. All that I shall ob-

serve farther, is This; that right Reason can teach us Nothing which is inconsistent with Truth or Fitness: Neither can God do so, who is essentially and absolutely reasonable. And if any Suppositions of the Nature abovemention'd, would be thought extravagant in the one Case, they must equally be so in the other.

I have observ'd above, that we are to pay an absolute Obedience to Revelation. But then the Use of Reason is not entirely excluded: For, we must try, by this very

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*this is nearly a knowingly put for to receive a Religion on y. Foot of Reason necessarily supposes no Sovereignty in Religion but Strict Unity; but infinite Religions might pass on the foot of Authority & that at one & y same Time at the ad the Epithets Supreme & infallible that's an abusive perverting y authors sense he writes against*



Reason, what is, or is not a Revelation; we must examine what is offer'd as reveal'd, whether it be capable of being reveal'd, or not, *i. e.* whether it be consistent with the sure and known Principles of Reason. And if every Thing be clear on this Head, then we must try, whether there be sufficient external Evidence to prove the Revelation. If there be, (and Reason is to determine on these Points,) then Reason itself leads us to Revelation.

But our Author observes, " It is an odd  
" Jumble; to prove the Truth of a Book by  
" the Truth of the Doctrines it contains;  
" and at the same Time to conclude these  
" Doctrines to be true, because contain'd in  
" that Book. " But, by this Gentleman's  
Leave, the Matter is by no means stated  
fairly. We do not prove the Truth of the  
Book by the Truth of the Doctrines: We  
do not affirm, that Reason leads us to ac-  
knowledge a Revelation, by antecedently  
proving the Truth of the Things reveal'd.  
This would be a Jumble indeed. But, what  
we affirm, is This; That Reason tries the  
Doctrines or Precepts as far as it can; and  
sees, whether any Objections can be made  
against them, from considering the Principles  
of natural Light. If not, then, for any  
Thing which appears to the contrary, these  
Doctrines may be true, and the Precepts  
deliver'd may be agreeable with the Will of  
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God. Whether they are so, or not, is another Question, and to be determin'd in another Way. Here Reason comes in again; and tries the Matters of Fact which are alledg'd as external Evidence, in the same way as other Matters of Fact are try'd. If every Thing shall appear right here, then the Things propos'd must be receiv'd as reveal'd; And when this Point is gain'd, we then infer, that the Particulars contain'd in the Revelation must be true. In this Way of representing the Matter, all is clear. Here are none of our Author's imaginary Jumbles. Reason leads us to acknowledge the Revelation: — How? Not by proving, antecedently to a Revelation, the particular Truths reveal'd; but by proving the Revelation itself. And the Revelation is prov'd, — How? By shewing, from the Nature of the Thing, that Reason hath no Objection against the Possibility of Matters declar'd by it; and afterwards, That the Facts alledg'd are sufficient to confirm it. The Consequence from this must be, That the Things so reveal'd are certain; That, in this Process, every Thing is ascrib'd to Reason, which doth, or possibly can belong to Reason; — That we are govern'd absolutely by Reason, as far as Reason carries us; and when it hath led us on to Revelation, we are then to be govern'd absolutely by Revelation.



Thus I have consider'd what our Author hath alledg'd against The Expediency of a Revelation, in order to the more perfect, more easy, and more general Knowledge of the Rule of Life. I have endeavour'd to shew, that there is no Inconsistency in the Regards we pay to Reason, and to Revelation; and that notwithstanding we affirm, we are to be absolutely govern'd by both, yet there is no such Jumble or Confusion in the Case, as this Gentleman imagines.

This, I say, I have endeavour'd to shew; Not that these Objections, as stated by him, are so very formidable, or contain any Thing specious; but because they are the only Arguments he alledges in direct Proof of his Point; and, because he insists on them with such an Air of Confidence, and carries on this Way of Reasoning for several Pages together. Had it not been for this, I should not have troubled myself with offering any Remarks on such Kinds of Arguing; which, however weak they are, and will appear to be to considering Men, may yet deceive unwary Readers, who take Confidence for Strength, and may be apt to credit a Man for affirming roundly, and repeating frequently. — But enough of this. The farther Expediency of a Revelation will appear from what shall be offer'd in the following Chapter.



CHAP. VIII.

*Whether a Revelation be not expedient,  
in order to enforce the general  
Practice of the Rule of Life.*

**H**ITHERTO I have endeavour'd  
to shew the Expediency of a  
Revelation, in order to fix and  
determine, for general Use, a  
proper Rule of Life : Which,  
tho' it should be thought discoverable by  
some, in the Use of Reason, who enjoy the  
Advantages of strong natural Parts, a liberal  
Education, and sufficient Leisure, must yet,  
in a great measure, be out of the Reach of  
others, of lower Station and Condition.

At present I shall suppose this proper  
Rule known, and assented to ; and Enquire,  
What must be the Consequence on this Sup-  
position ? In this Case, I think, it must be  
allow'd, that as every rational Being must  
take a Pleasure in acting agreeably to the  
Rules of Reason, as far as these Rules ap-



pear to him; so, were there no Hindrance in the Way, Men would doubtless act the right Part uniformly. For, tho' a Liberty there must be in Man, as there is in every intelligent Being; yet still Men are in Fact determin'd to that Side which appears the best, so long as it appears to be so: It follows, that as long as they carefully attend to Reason, and feel a Satisfaction in acting agreeably, (which Satisfaction cannot, and they are conscious cannot, be obtain'd in any other Way), so long, we may assure ourselves, they will behave as reasonable Beings are concern'd to do. Upon this I presume that the Angels in Heaven, tho' not absolutely impeccable, will not in the Event conduct themselves amiss; as having a quick Sense of what is fit and proper to be done, and no Temptations to deviate from this Rule: And upon the same Ground may we presume likewise, that Good Men, in the other World, will preserve their Innocence inviolate.

But those who reckon upon such a right State of human Nature in the present Constitution of Things, seem to have consider'd Matters slightly. For, over and above the Imperfection of our intellectual Capacities, (of which enough hath been said heretofore), we have a Variety of strong Passions to combat. Some Tendencies are constitutional; Others arise from Education, Custom,

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Custom, or perhaps the very Kind of Life we are oblig'd to live in. To which may be added, outward Temptations of almost every Kind; Example, Solicitation, Interest, Pleasure, Power. Men receive such a strong Bias from some or other of these, as requires very powerful Motives on the other Side; and without which, it cannot be hop'd they should be kept right, or be prevented from acting that Part, which in their cooler Hours they must condemn.

In such a State as this, Men cannot be prevail'd on to pursue an uniform Course of Virtue, but upon one or other of these Suppositions.

1. That the mere Pleasure of acting Well, is a Balance for all the Inconveniencies of doing otherwise, of whatever Kind they be; and that amidst all the Embarrassments of Passions and Temptations, the Consideration of this virtuous Pleasure hath sufficient Room to act upon the Mind, and to influence the Choice. Or,

2. If this should not prove the Case, that there are some external Motives, arising from the Effects and Consequences of our Actions, sufficient to produce what the mere Fitness and Reasonableness of the Thing cannot do.

*First* then, It may perhaps be affirm'd, That the mere Pleasure of doing Well, is a Balance for all the Inconveniencies of acting  
other.

otherwise, of whatever Kind they be. Upon which I must observe, That this Affirmation supposes, not only that Men, as rational Creatures; take a Satisfaction in Truth, and the Consciousness of acting agreeably to Truth; but likewise, that there is such a moral Taste implanted in us, as shall carry us farther than a mere Affection and Regard for Truth can do. This, I conceive, is evident from hence; That if Men were influenc'd no farther than mere Truth, as such, could carry them, they would be equally influenc'd by all Truths; and consequently, by Metaphysical or Natural Truth, as much as by Moral. Now, do we find in Fact, that Metaphysical or Natural Truth, when it is combated by any of the afore-mention'd Difficulties, is sufficient to gain our Approbation, or to determine our Choice? Would a Man die, to confirm the Truth of a Philosophical Problem? Or, if this should be thought too extravagant a Question, Let me demand, Whether the Affection for mere Truth be such, as will prevail with Men, in the general, to forego any extraordinary Pleasure, or to incur any extraordinary Pain? to throw up any Advantages in View, or to incur any considerable Loss or Calamity? I do not affirm but Instances may sometimes be produc'd of Men, who, for the sake of some favourite Truths, have ventur'd all this; and such Instances there possibly may be again.



again. But then it is worth remarking, that if this were done for the sake of Truth, merely as such, it would equally hold with regard to any Truth whatsoever. Yet, hath the World ever produc'd a Man, who thought himself concern'd to pursue every Kind of Truth at this Rate? If not, then 'tis evident, that there must be something very particular in those Truths, which a Man pursues so ardently; Something which recommends them to his Approbation and Esteem in a singular manner; Or, some Suitableness in them to the particular Genius and Temper of the Man.

That which I call Genius, with reference to any other Kind of Truths, and by which a Man is not only qualify'd to penetrate far into Matters, and to distinguish nicely, but likewise to pursue Things of that Kind, in Opposition to every Sort of Discouragement, That, in the Point I am now upon, I shall term a Moral Sense or Taste. This implies such a quick Perception of the Agreeableness and Beauty of what is fitting, as gains our Approbation, and determines us strongly to pursue it. The Practice of Virtue, as such, can be supported on no other Foot than this: For, if there be implanted in us a natural Desire of what is good or pleasing, and a natural Aversion from what is evil or displeasing, we cannot possibly chuse Virtue, as such, in Opposition to these, but where  
there



there is something in Virtue which makes it more desirable than any other Good, something in Vice which is worse than may be found in any other Evil we are expos'd to. And this, I say, can be built on Nothing else but the Sense or Taste above mention'd.

Thus much indeed must here be granted, that there is somewhat of this Kind implanted in human Nature : There is a Power not only of distinguishing, in some measure, what is right or wrong in Actions, but likewise a Tendency or Inclination to act agreeably ; to pursue the one, and to avoid the other. But then we should observe withal, that this moral Sense doth not prevail alike in all Persons. Different Men have it in different Degrees. Perhaps the very Original Principle itself may be various in several Men, just as many other Faculties are found to be : Or, if it should be affirm'd, That in the original Constitution of human Nature this Principle must be every-where the same ; we find, That, as Things now subsist, it is not in Fact alike every-where : For, some Persons abhor what others practise not only without Remorse, but with Pleasure.

But, to allow as much as can be ask'd in Favour of this Moral Sense, and original Tendency to Virtue, Let us suppose it were every-where uniform ; yet, before this Principle can have its Effect, we must suppose, that Men  
are

are inclin'd to regard and attend to an Admonition of this Kind. Without this, the general Principle will signify nothing. An habitual Knowledge of Truth is of no Moment without an actual Knowledge of it, *i. e.* unless Men attend to, and consider it. Just in the same manner the having a general Tendency to conduct ourselves aright must be useless, if there be any contrary Movements, which shall turn us aside from considering the Truth of the Case, and, consequently, disappoint the Effect of that moral Inclination, which would otherwise arise from the right View of Things.

Now, I think it obvious, that inward Affections and Passions, awaken'd in us by outward Temptations, and those especially which have some very great apparent Good or Evil for their Objects, are apt to overpower the Mind. Let the Generality of Mankind be try'd, and let it be seen how they do, or will act on such Occasions. If, in some few, the Virtuous Principle hath gain'd such Possession, and prevail'd so far, as to be ever present, much may be expected, no doubt: But, if it shall happen, either thro' wrong Education, or any other Cause, that Mens Thoughts are dissipated, and their Passions become strong, they will be hurried away immediately, and be found to act in just the same irregular Manner, when Temptations urge them, as tho' they had never been



been possess'd of any such Principle at all. At least, this must prove the Case, as often as any great or sudden Terror presents itself to them; or, any very important and immediate Advantage in Life is to be gained. To say, that, in such a Case, the mere Sense of Virtue, and of what is really fit and proper in Life, will bear them out, and to affirm this, not only of some few Persons, of an extraordinary moral Taste, but likewise of the common and ordinary Sort, is to contradict the well-known Experience of the World, in all Ages of it.

If this be the Case, What can we farther suppose in Aid of Virtue? Some possibly may tell us, That the real Advantages arising from it, in the natural Effects which it produces, are sufficient for this Purpose. But, are there, in Fact, such Advantages which spring universally from the Practice of Virtue? It must indeed be own'd, that, upon the Whole, a virtuous Course is preferable to a vicious one, even tho' we should look no farther than the present Life; or, if you please, that a Man of a general good Conduct, will, for the most Part, and in the ordinary Course of Things, enjoy more Happiness than can be had in a contrary Way: And, If the Practice of Virtue were universal and uniform, I may be bold to affirm, that all that Happiness would be really enjoy'd, which can be had in the present Constitution  
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of Things. But then, it should be remember'd, that, whilst Some are well dispos'd, and desirous of ordering their Actions right, Others are as strongly inclin'd another Way. These will take Advantage of the Honesty and Simplicity of the truly virtuous Man; and, perhaps, bring Misfortunes on him by Means of the very Virtue he enjoys. It may happen, and sometimes does so, that to be resolute in the Cause of Virtue, shall deprive a Man of every Advantage he can hope for in Life, and, perhaps, even of Life itself; as, on the other hand, One base and villainous Action shall gain him singular Advantages, and set him above being accountable to any Man. Shall any one affirm therefore, that, upon this State of the Matter, the natural Advantages of Virtue are sufficient to keep up the uniform Practice of it? This would be to affirm, that the Miseries which it occasions are in themselves eligible.

Yet, we may give up this too, and support our Point upon almost any Concessions which can be made. Be it therefore that Virtue is, in every Instance of it, really attended with natural Advantages; and that Men are so far from suffering, upon the whole, this Way, that they gain to themselves such natural Goods as cannot be secur'd in any other: Let this, I say, be suppos'd; Yet I may demand, Whether every Thing of this Kind  
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be so clear and apparent, that all Men shall see it immediately. Is not the Evil, which is many Times incurr'd on the Account of Virtue, present and sensible, whilst the good Consequences of it are remote and out of Sight? Is not the Management of Providence such as requires much Thought and Observation, to clear up Difficulties, and to shew, that, upon the Whole, it is really better to act virtuously, in every Instance, than otherwise? If this be true, then How, I would desire to know, can the Generality of Mankind be influenced from hence? It will be vain to alledge, that, in every Instance of virtuous Conduct, a Man's own Interest is really consulted, either in a direct Way, as it happens frequently; or else, by contributing to the publick Good, in which his own likewise is included: It will, I say, be vain to alledge this, (however true it may be in itself,) unless Men can be made sensible, that these Allegations are true, and such Impressions can be made on them as shall bring these Thoughts to their Mind whenever fit Occasions offer.

After all, if the former Methods of recommending and enforcing the Practice of Virtue should fail, there still remains another, which, it may be thought, will supply their Defects; *viz.* The Annexing some Advantages or Disadvantages to Mens Actions, over and above the natural Consequences of them: These, if they are of any high Importance, and

and so clearly denounc'd, that every Man shall, in Fact, know them, or may know them, if he pleases, will be strong Enforcements, and sufficient to obtain their End.

This may, indeed, be said: But will not this Scheme be attended with as many Difficulties as the former? Let me demand, Who shall fix the Rewards or Penalties propos'd? How shall Men be assur'd, that such Sanctions are really fix'd, and will, in Fact, be executed? If we are referr'd to the Civil Power, for Support of this Scheme, then, besides what hath been advanc'd heretofore, p. 93. I may observe, That, to do this effectually, we must carry Matters farther than either the Ends of Civil Government will justify, or the Condition of human Nature allow of.

The End of Civil Government is, I conceive, Protection, whether from foreign Injuries, or domestick. To this Purpose it is necessary, 1. That the whole Force of the Community be united, some Way or other, in order to repel Invaders; and, 2. That such Acts be restrained amongst the Members of this Community, whereby the Peace and Prosperity of it are impeach'd.

If this be the Case, then Civil Government is concern'd, 1. Rather to punish Crimes, than to reward Virtues; And, 2. In punishing Crimes, it can regard those only which have some direct Influence towards destroying the Peace or Prosperity of that Society.

Society. Thus, it may restrain, in some measure, the grosser Acts of Injury and Injustice; and, for this End, Penalties are inflicted. But doth it, in like manner, reward the Just, or assign any special Advantages to be enjoy'd by those who conform themselves to Law? This, I believe, is seldom seen, and not at all agreeable to the Usages of those States which are thought the best regulated.

Nor can this, in the Nature of Things, be done sufficiently: For, let us suppose, that a Man's outward Actions are regular; Upon this Supposition, he hath perform'd all that Civil Laws require; His inward Thoughts are not cognizable in an human Court; These are incapable of being known; or, if they were known, yet cannot be punish'd. In this Sense, mere Thought is free, that, as no Man can prescribe to it in the Way of Authority, so neither can He reward or punish it.

Beyond this, there are many outward Acts of Virtue, which must be exempt from human Prescription. Thus, Gratitude, Charity, and the like, must be free as Thought itself. To require these in the same manner as other Acts are requir'd, would alter the very Nature of the Things: They would then become properly Debts; and Men would be concern'd to discharge them, not as Instances of Humanity or Thankfulness, but purely as the Prescriptions of that Law they durst not disobey. For some such Reason as this St. Paul declares,



declares, (what is true, whether he intended it of the Civil Law or not) that *the Law is not made for a righteous Man, but for the lawless and disobedient.* 1 Tim. 1. 9. It is intended, not as a compleat Measure of what is fit and right, and agreeable to the Will of God, (which cannot be fully pointed out this Way, or sufficiently enforc'd in it) but only to guard against those Exorbitances, which are destructive of all human Society.

We may conclude, from what hath been said, that the same Being who fram'd the World, and constituted Things in such a Manner, that certain Rules of Fitness result from them, must enforce Obedience to these Rules. On any other Foot these will rather appear to us as Counsels and Advices, than Matters of strict and proper Duty. It hath been shewn above, that, whilst Human Nature subsists as it doth at present, Virtue can neither enforce itself, nor can it be sufficiently bound on us in a human Way: Something therefore must be found out, to ballance the Affections and Passions of Men; and this cannot be done, but by Sanctions establish'd by God himself.

Yet our Author thinks this is needless, and, which is more, impossible. Rewards or Punishments to be received hereafter, unless they be the natural Consequences of Mens Actions, he explodes: And, tho' he speaks sometimes of future Happiness; and inti-

mates somewhat (when he thinks it will serve his Turn) of Rewards and Punishments; yet, as I do not remember he hath any where expressly asserted them in the general Sense which they carry, so in one Place he hath used his Endeavours to overthrow them. His Words are these; " Tho' human Law-givers are forc'd to have Recourse to Punishments, which are not connected with the Things they forbid, yet a Being of infinite Power is not thus streighten'd, but may make one the necessary Consequence of the other. And, indeed, how can it be otherwise, since Good and Evil have their Foundation in the Essential Difference of Things, and their Nature is fix'd and immoveable, and, consequently, our Happiness depends on the intrinsic Nature of the one, and our Misery on the intrinsic Nature of the other. " p. 26.

It is from hence certain, and will be farther confirm'd by our Author's Way of Reasoning in the former Page, that he admits none other Rewards or Punishments than those which are the necessary and inseparable Consequences of Mens Actions. In the Words now cited he affirms, 1. That God may reward or punish in this Way. And, 2. That he must do so.

As to the former, I would beg to know what Adversary he is contending with. What Person ever asserted, that God cannot make

make Happiness or Misery the necessary Consequences of Mens Actions? Doth not every Man, capable of understanding this Subject, maintain, not only that God may do this, but that in many Instances He actually hath done it? Nay, do we not maintain farther, in as strong Terms as himself, that, when Men come to reflect coolly, they must receive Comfort from the Consciousness of having acted well, and be griev'd under the Sense of having acted ill? But, what of all this! Doth it follow that this is of itself sufficient, in the present State of Things, to enforce the uniform Practice of Virtue? Is every Man sensible of these Consequences? Or, doth every Man so nicely examine his own Actions, as to produce that Comfort or Remorse which might arise from a proper View of them? If not, then something farther is expedient for the purpose.

He asserts, in the next Place, That God must reward or punish Men in this Manner. "How (says he) can it be otherwise, since "Good and Evil have their Foundation in "the essential Difference of Things." Tho' it be plain enough what our Author intends to prove in this Place, yet 'tis not so clear Where the Force of his Argument lies. There are Two Kinds of Good or Evil, *viz.* Natural and Moral; and his Business is to shew, that natural Good or Evil is necessarily connected with moral Good or Evil. How



this is prov'd by the Argument here produc'd I cannot see, and our Author is concern'd to shew it. However, were there any Thing in the Argument, it still remains to be shewn, that this natural Good or Evil, which may be the distant Consequence of Mens Actions must necessarily be greater than the present Advantage, or Disadvantage, which may possibly arise from them. Unless this be shewn, Virtue may need some stronger Enforcements than any which arise from the present Consideration; and consequently, we shall be led to enquire somewhat farther into this Point.

It hath been observ'd by me heretofore, p. 94. that Wise and Good Men have argued in the following Manner; As God must have an unalterable Love of Righteousness, so he cannot be suppos'd to leave its Interests unsupported. And therefore, if this cannot be, or in Fact is not sufficiently done in the present Management of Things, Amends will be made hereafter. This Conclusion they farther supported by several other useful Considerations. Notwithstanding this, I have noted, that they did not all of them agree upon the Point; that those who affirm'd it with Confidence, on some Occasions, intimated their Distrust of it on others; and that the very Arguments by which they endeavour'd to evince the Matter (whatever Force they might really have) were too subtle and abstracted,

abstracted, and not suited to the Apprehensions of the Vulgar. To which was added, that, notwithstanding the Generality of Mankind had a certain Persuasion of a future State, yet, as their Notions were indistinct, and not built on a solid Foundation, so they must prove insufficient to bear them out in the constant Practice of Virtue. This Persuasion could not enable them to combat those Temptations which were extraordinary and pressing.

How then shall the Cause of Virtue be maintain'd, and the proper Rule of Life enforc'd? But, can this be any longer a Question with us? Cannot God declare his Intention in this respect? If the Author of our Being may make us happy or miserable, is it impossible for him to manifest to us in an extraordinary Way what he designs to do? If a Revelation be possible, as I have shewn heretofore, then this *may* be done; and, if it be of any Consequence to us to have a more certain and distinct View of these Things than our own Reason can give us, or the Opportunities we enjoy will admit of, then no one can affirm that it is unfit or improper to be done: And when we consider farther, that the doing this is entirely suitable to the Righteousness, Goodness, and Wisdom of God, then we may conclude that the Thing is expedient, and what might be hop'd for

when it should be consistent with the several other Schemes of Providence.

I must not quit this Head, Of the Expediency of a Revelation, without considering Two Objections alledg'd by this Gentleman.

1. If a Revelation be expedient to be made to Any, it must be equally expedient to be made to All : And consequently, as it ought to have commenc'd with the first Beginning of Human Kind, so it ought to have been communicated to all the World ; whereas it is not pretended, on our Part, that the Christian Revelation was made 'till Four Thousand Years were pass'd, nor that it is to this very Day universally promulgated.

2. It is affirm'd, That this Revelation hath not in Fact answer'd those Purposes for which we affirm it to have been expedient ; and that Men are so far from being the better for it, that it hath actually prov'd the Cause of greater Wickedness, Cruelty, and Persecution, than were ever known before. Some Notice must be taken of these Two Objections, before I proceed to evince and support the Reality of a Revelation.

The *first* Objection is represented by our Author in the following Words ; “ If the  
“ Design of God, in communicating any  
“ Thing of Himself to Men, was their Happiness ; would not that Design have  
“ oblig'd him, who at all Times alike desires  
“ their Happiness, to have at all Times alike  
“ come



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“ communicated it to them ? If God always  
 “ acts for the Good of his Creatures, What  
 “ Reason can be assign'd why he should not  
 “ from the Beginning have discover'd such  
 “ Things as make for their Good, but de-  
 “ ferr'd the doing it 'till the Time of *Tibe-*  
 “ *rius* ; since the sooner this was done, the  
 “ greater would his Goodness appear to be ?  
 “ Nay, is it consistent with infinite Benevo-  
 “ lence to hide that for many Ages, which  
 “ he knew was as useful at first to prevent,  
 “ as afterwards it could be to put a Stop to  
 “ any Thing he dislik'd ? ”

“ And indeed, without denying that God  
 “ at all Times intended Mankind that Hap-  
 “ piness their Nature is capable of, we must  
 “ allow that at all Times he has given them  
 “ the Means of obtaining it by the Rules  
 “ he has prescrib'd them for their Conduct ;  
 “ and consequently, these Rules must have  
 “ been discoverable at all Times. For, if  
 “ God acts upon rational Motives, must not  
 “ the same Motives which oblig'd him to  
 “ discover any Thing that is for the Good  
 “ of Mankind, have oblig'd him to discover  
 “ every Thing that is so ? and that too,  
 “ after the same plain manner ; and not do  
 “ this, as it were, grudgingly, Little by  
 “ Little ; here a Bit, and there a Bit ; and  
 “ that too to one favourite Nation only,  
 “ under the Vail of Types and Allegories ;  
 “ and at last, tho' he discover'd some Things  
 “ more

“ more plainly, yet it was but to a small  
 “ Part of Mankind, the Bulk of them to  
 “ this Day remaining in deplorable Igno-  
 “ rance.” p. 393, 394.

There are Three Things here asserted by  
 our Author.

1. If a Revelation be thought so expedient to be made, as we on our Part contend, it ought to have been made to us in the Beginning, and not deferr'd 'till the Time of *Tiberius*; since the sooner this was done, the greater would God's Goodness appear to be.

2. That this Revelation, so made to us in the Beginning, ought to extend itself to every Thing which is for the Good of Mankind; and not be granted (as he expresses himself) grudgingly, Little by Little.

3. That it ought to be granted, as at all Times, and in the fullest Manner, so likewise every-where, and to every Person alike: Not to one favourite Nation only, or to a small Part of Mankind, the Bulk of them to this Day remaining in deplorable Ignorance.

These Three Assertions are directly contain'd in the Objection produc'd: In which, if there be any Thing of Truth or Weight, it will bear full as hard upon Natural Religion as Reveal'd. For, according to this Way of Arguing, If God intended the Happiness of Man, by communicating himself  
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to him in the Use of Reason, Would not that Design have oblig'd Him, who at all Times alike desires his Happiness, to have communicated himself always alike this Way? and consequently, To have given him the full Use of his Reason the first Moment of his Being; and not have deferr'd this for several Years of Infancy and Childhood? Would He not have discover'd every Thing that was fit and proper, and capable of being known by him in Time, at once; so as that he should not come to the Knowledge of it gradually and by slow Steps, gaining it by Little and Little; here a Bit, and there a Bit? Would he, after all, make so great a Difference between Men; making Some, a small Part of Mankind, his Favourites, by vouchsafing them a greater Measure of Natural Parts, and greater Opportunities of Learning and Improvement? If Arguings of this Kind are thought to conclude against the Usefulness and Expediency of Revelation, they must conclude, with as great Force, against the Usefulness of those Truths which are discover'd by Reason; and consequently, they must prove that Men are not one whit better than Brutes themselves. Or, if this must not be asserted, then the least that our Author can conclude, is, That the Supreme Being deals unequally and hardly by his Creatures; whilst he supposes that the Goodness of God obliges him



him to communicate all Advantages, in their own Nature capable of being communicated; and this in all Degrees, and at all Times equally: For, the sooner this is done, (and for the same Reason I may say, the more extensively it is done) the greater will God's Goodness appear to be. Fact contradicts such fond and extravagant Reasonings as these; and he cannot possibly support them but by carrying Matters still farther, and charging God with Iniquity.

I must beg Leave to add some farther Reflexions on this Point; by which I shall endeavour to shew, that his own Natural Religion is as much affected by this Method of Reasoning, as Revelation itself can be. The Principle on which he proceeds, is This; Since God always desires, and acts for the Good of his Creatures, he must always discover those Things which make for their Good. These are his own Words, and must be resolv'd into this farther Principle, *viz.* That he must be oblig'd to bestow all that Good he is capable of bestowing: From whence these Consequences will follow;

1. That He ought to bestow on every Man all that Happiness, whether present or future, whether Animal, or Intellectual, of which his Nature is in itself capable, and which the Faculties He hath bestow'd upon him make him capable of enjoying.

2. That

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2. That he ought to have bestow'd upon him such a Nature, and such Faculties, as would qualify him for all that Happiness which is in itself capable of being bestow'd on any Being whatsoever.

3. That he ought not to have made any Difference or Distinction between the several Beings he created ; but to have given them the same Nature, the same Perfections, and by this Means to have qualify'd them for the very same Degrees of Happiness. To which we may add,

4. That forasmuch as the sooner all this is done, the greater God's Goodness must appear, He ought therefore to have produc'd all his Creatures from all Eternity : Or, if this might not be, all new Production supposing some antecedent Duration, then He ought not to have produc'd any Creatures at all. These Consequences follow manifestly from our Author's Principles ; And therefore, if these are extravagant, the Principles, from which they follow, must be false.

From these Remarks on the Objection in general, I shall pass on to the distinct Consideration of its several Branches.

The 1<sup>st</sup> was this ; If a Revelation be thought so expedient to be made, as we on our Part contend, then it ought to have been made to us in the Beginning, and not deferr'd 'till the Time of *Tiberius*. But, do  
we

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we really assert, as this Gentleman seems to intimate we do, that there was no Revelation made 'till the Time of *Tiberius*? He knows the contrary: And a little after, in the Passage above cited, he alludes as well to the Jewish Revelation as the Christian.

Well: But the Objection, he will tell us, still holds good; because many Ages were pass'd before the Delivery of *Moses's* Law. Very true: But then, Can he prove, that no Revelation was ever made 'till *Moses's* Time? Or, Is he perswaded that we Christians think there was none? How came he then to talk of God's discovering Things as it were grudgingly, by Little and Little? This, I suppose, must allude to the several Manifestations which we affirm God made of himself at *sundry Times, and in divers Manners*.

After all, He will tell us, however this Matter shall stand, the Objection is in full Force. The Revelation which we affirm to have been expedient, is a Revelation of a proper Rule of Life? And Nothing of this Kind was ever offer'd 'till the Times of *Moses*. Yet, how will he prove this, if he should be call'd on to prove it? How will he prove that the whole Scheme of what he calls Natural Religion, was not originally discover'd to our first Parent by immediate Revelation? By him it might be taught his immediate Successors; from whence

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whence it may have descended down in many Successions from one to another, 'till at last it might be forgot from what Original it sprung : and then being alter'd, as the Iniquities or Follies of Mankind increas'd, those several monstrous Schemes might arise which were taught in the several Parts of the World. Our Author, I say, cannot prove that this was not the Case. But if it were so, then what he alledges from the bare Novelty of a Revelation is vain and groundless.

However, not to insist on this, I do affirm, That upon Supposition a Revelation had not been vouchsaf'd so early, the State and Condition of the World might be such, as not to need it in that Degree, in which they afterwards came to need it. It is certain, that in every Age of the World all Men have not needed this Favour equally. Those who have enjoy'd an happy Constitution, had quick Parts, been rightly educated, and gain'd sufficient Opportunities for carrying on their Enquiries, have certainly had less Occasion for supernatural Instruction, than others who have labour'd under the contrary Disadvantages. Thus likewise, in the more simple Ages of the World, before Men had degenerated to so prodigious a Degree, whilst Men were as yet few, and the Temptations to act amiss, small ; good Instruction might be easily propagated, and

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the World kept in some Order. But as human Race increas'd, so the Interest of Vice got Ground. Each ill Man endeavour'd to seduce his Neighbour; Temptations offer'd themselves on every Hand; Many Vices were become fashionable; and, in some Instances, supported on Principle, and practis'd even as Duties. Who doth not discern, that such a Condition as this, was more unfriendly to the Cause of Virtue, than the Simplicity of the first Ages? That some extraordinary Methods were now more needful than they had been before? and consequently, a Reason may be assign'd, in this Way of Thinking, why a Revelation should be vouchsafed Men in one Age, which had been withheld formerly.

Yet, our Author thinks this will not serve our Purpose; For he demands, "How it is  
 " consistent with infinite Benevolence, to  
 " hide that for many Ages, which God knew  
 " was as useful at first to prevent, as afterwards it could be to put a Stop to any  
 " Thing he dislik'd." These are the very Words of our Author: Upon which I might observe, That there is either great Impropriety in his Expressions; or, if he is willing to be understood in the more favourable Sense of them, there is something insinuated, which is absolutely false and groundless.  
 "How (says he) is it consistent with infinite  
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" what God knew was useful ? " &c. The Thing affirm'd to be useful, &c. and concerning which he is here speaking, is, a Divine Revelation ; or, what he terms, a few Lines before, " God's communicating " any Thing of himself to Men. " But to " hide a Revelation, " is Something so very much out of the Way, that I cannot understand it. However, Let us interpret the Gentleman in a more favourable manner ; Let us suppose he means by it, The " Hiding from " Men, for many Ages, the Knowledge and " Sense of Duty. " If this be what he means, then I must observe, That this is a very unfair Representation of the Case. Do we assert, that the Want of that Knowledge which is necessary, in order to the right Apprehension of Moral and Religious Matters, is owing to God's hiding it from us ? Don't we affirm, That originally Man had a full View of all he was concern'd to know ? That afterward, having acted disagreeably to this Knowledge, he corrupted his Nature, impair'd his Reason, and heighten'd his Passions ? Don't we suppose farther, That during the more simple Ages, Man might in general know so much as was sufficient to keep him within some tolerable Bounds ? But that afterwards, when human Race increas'd, and Men, abusing their Liberty, had corrupted themselves farther, Vice might get Ground so far, as not to be stopp'd but by

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an extraordinary Manifestation? Upon this State of the Matter, are not the Corruptions of Men owing rather to their own Perverseness, than to God's hiding from them the Knowledge of their Duty? Why then is God here charged with Cruelty?

The main Thing however design'd in the Objection, is This; If a Revelation be now expedient in order to put a Stop to the Corruptions of Mankind, it must have been as expedient in order to prevent them in the Beginning; and infinite Benevolence is concern'd as well to do the one as the other. In Answer to which, Let it be consider'd, That Divine Revelation, (as the Point hath been stated by us), is a Remedy graciously intended for the Cure of those Corruptions which had overspread human Nature; and that Remedies are not properly to be administer'd, till the Disease makes them necessary. In the next Place, These Corruptions did not arise from the Want of Revelation, but from Something else. Originally Man is suppos'd to have known what was fit and proper for him to do, and to have been acquainted with the several Motives to enforce his Duty: Yet he fell; and, by his Fall, brought a Taint and Corruption on his Nature. Afterward it is suppos'd that Men had such a View of Things, as might, had they been duely careful, have kept them within some Bounds.

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Whence then came it to pass that Men degenerated so exceedingly? Why, from hence; they are free, and enjoy a natural Freedom of acting Wrong as well as Right: By abusing this, they made that necessary, which in the original Constitution was not so. This charges the Fault not on God, but Man; and consequently, Man only can be accountable for the Consequence.

If there be any thing in the Difficulty before suggested still remaining, it will, I conceive, be remov'd by observing what I shall propose in the next Place, *viz.* When we affirm a Revelation to be *expedient*, the Term hath a Double Acceptation, and may be referr'd either to Persons or Things. When referr'd to Persons, it imports a Want of Something, which upon that Account we affirm to be expedient; But when referr'd to Things, it not only imports some Want, but likewise a Fitness and Propriety in bestowing the Thing needed. The Use I would make of the Distinction is This; However the State of the World might make a Revelation needful for Mankind, and therefore expedient, as the Word is referr'd to Persons; yet several Circumstances may intervene, which shall render it unfit and improper to be made; and consequently, in the more general Sense of the Word, inexpedient. This may account, in some measure, for the Question before us, *viz.* "If

"a Revelation be expedient, Why was it not sooner made?"

The Revelation I am speaking of being a Divine Manifestation and Enforcement of some general Rule of Life intended for the general Use of the World, could not properly be made, whilst Mankind were incapable of applying it to this Purpose; whilst they wanted sufficient Means either to preserve it in its Purity, or to transmit it safely to future Ages.

We know how difficult it must be to preserve any System incorrupt in the Way of Oral Tradition. Rules may easily be forgotten, or misapprehended; Errors will creep in insensibly, and sometimes be introduc'd by Fraud. It was proper therefore that the Fate of such a Revelation should not be trusted to this uncertain Way; and consequently, that it should not be made, till Men had discover'd some surer Method of recording it. From whence it follows, that the Invention of Letters must reasonably come before such a Revelation, as being the best, and indeed the only Expedient, we know of, to preserve a Truth inviolate.

And here I have the Pleasure of observing, That the Reasonings offer'd, are confirm'd by strong Appearances of Fact. In all Probability, a Revelation was actually made within some short Time after the Discovery of Letters; as soon as the Use of them was well





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well known, and they were capable of being apply'd to general and common Service. Thus much is certain, that some of the Sacred Writings are the Oldest Books now extant in the World: And possibly, the very first that were ever wrote, contain in them such a Revelation as I am now defending. If this prove true, then the Difficulty before us vanishes. Upon this Supposition, a Revelation there was as soon as it could be made for the Service of Mankind; and consequently, as soon as it was fit and proper to make it.

I must allow indeed, that this Revelation made to Moses, was intended for the more especial Service of the Jews. It contain'd over-and-above the general Rules of Life, their national Law; and of Consequence, must, in a great Part of it, be peculiar to that People. Yet still, it was not so entirely restrain'd to them, as to be unknown to others. It was the publick Profession of a People which made no inconsiderable Figure; which had, for several Ages, a great Weight with their neighbouring Nations: And afterwards, when their State was ruin'd, they had greater Opportunities than ever of spreading the Knowledge of the True God. The Captives, who were dispers'd, carry'd their Religion with them: They retain'd it in some measure, no doubt; and therefore, may be suppos'd to have given the ignorant

*But what would the Dean say to this further Difficulty whether a better Revelation viz. written in y<sup>e</sup> Heart could not have been, & that would be consistent with Mankind*



World some better Notions of Things than they had before. Or, if it should be thought that these Persons were too little acquainted with their Religion, to make any great Discoveries of it, (as a great many of them perhaps were); yet after their Restoration, Things were put on a better Foot. The Law was better known and understood after the Erection of Synagogues; and the People had a more free Intercourse with remote Nations than formerly. There were few Countries of any considerable Figure in which there was not a competent Number of Jews residing, by whom the several Particulars of their Religion might be, and probably were communicated to the World. From this View of Matters, we may conclude, that the Jewish Law, tho' made originally to a particular People, and in several Branches of it proper to that People, was not confin'd to them alone. It might be, and probably was known in a good Degree almost everywhere. Those, amongst whom the Jews liv'd, might profit much by their Instructions: Many Parts of what hath been reckon'd the most excellent Philosophy, might be deriv'd from them, or corrected by them; and the Religion, which is now call'd Natural Religion, in its last Resort, be built on Reveal'd. At least thus much may be presum'd, that as the most eminent of the Philosophers travell'd in Quest of Wisdom, and embrac'd all Opportunities

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portunities of improving themselves, so they did not entirely overlook the Religion of a People so numerous as the Jews were, and so strongly recommended by the Appearances of a Divine Original. Or, if this should not really prove the Case, yet one Thing must be allow'd me, That the several Parts of the World in which the Jews were dispers'd, were not so much Strangers to their Books, as to know Nothing of what was contain'd in them. They must be appriz'd of this, That they expected a *Messias*; and so singular an Expectation would naturally lead them to enquire somewhat into the Grounds of it. If therefore there were none other Advantages arising to the rest of Mankind from the Manifestations formerly made to the Jews, yet this at least is considerable, That they prepar'd the Way to another Dispensation, of a more extensive Nature, the Christian.

This indeed was not given 'till the Reign of *Tiberius*: But no Prejudice will arise from hence, if it be consider'd, That the Time of giving it was, upon several Accounts, more fit and proper than any which had gone before it. I shall mention only Two: viz. That the State of the World was such, as made a Revelation at that Time, 1. More likely to be attended to, and embrac'd; and, 2. More easily spread thro' the several Parts of the World.

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I have mention'd above, That the World had been gradually prepar'd for the Coming of a Great Law-giver, by the Intercourse which the Jews had with other Nations, and their several Settlements amongst them. And in this we are confirm'd by some Testimonies which remain even in Heathen Writers. At present I am to note, That as Politeness, Civility, and Learning were now at their Height, so there was excited in Mankind a greater Curiosity than had been ever known before. Their Capacity of being wrought upon was greater, and their Inclination to learn more vigorous. They had now seen what Philosophy could do: They were more sensible of its Defects, in Proportion to the Improvements they had made in it; and consequently, must be presum'd more ready to hearken to some surer Guide. Agreeably we find that the Philosophers, with whom *St. Paul* debated at *Athens*, gave him a patient Hearing, some of them being curious enough to promise a second; [See *Acts* xvii. 32.] And tho' the mere Novelty of a Resurrection startled them at first, yet, upon farther Thought, it might appear, that ordinary Measures are not to be observ'd upon extraordinary Occasions. Difficulties enough there were in gaining a thorough Admission of this Religion; But yet, in any other Season it would, probably, have been more difficult; in any other Season, when

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when Men had not been sufficiently prepar'd for somewhat of this Nature ; or were so exceedingly indolent and incurious as to afford no Attention to it.

This Reflexion shall be seconded by observing, that the Circumstances of the World favour'd this Religion in another Respect, viz. That they made the Promulgation of it more easy and extensive. The *Roman Arms* had prevail'd over a great Part of the known World. They had subdu'd many large Provinces, both in *Europe, Asia, and Africk*, and erected an Empire of prodigious Extent. The Government was now pretty well settled: And, as their Empire was vastly large, and the Affairs of it compos'd, so there must have been a more free Intercourse between the several Nations than had been ever known before. Who doth not discern, that this was a fitter Time to spread the Knowledge of a Revelation, than whilst the Jealousies which subsisted between different Nations prevented a Correspondence, or Civil Distractions would allow no Room for Religious Enquiries? This, I think, is plain and certain ; and therefore must insist on it, that no sufficient Objection can be alledg'd against making the Revelation at this Time, unless it be shewn, that some former Times were more proper. Men might indeed want it sooner : But, in relieving Wants, it ought to be remember'd, that there is a Suitableness of



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of the Time as well as a Usefulness of the Thing ; and that the Kindness in doing a Favour is then most eminent, when the Effects of it will be most general and certain.

The Second Branch of our Author's Objection, is This ; A Revelation, if expedient, ought to extend itself to every thing which is for the Good of Mankind ; and be given not as it were grudgingly, by little and little. This Branch must respect, not the Christian Revelation, which was given at once, and contains one perfect Scheme, but the several Occasional Revelations which were granted in former Times ; and seems to allude to a Passage in the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, where it is asserted, that *God who at sundry Times, and in divers Manners, spake in Times past unto our Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last Days spoken unto us by his Son.*

Upon this I must observe, that, if the Lateness of a Revelation may be defended, and no sufficient Objection can arise from hence, that God did not manifest himself in an extraordinary Manner sooner ; then we may equally account for the Point before us, viz. That every Revelation vouchsafed to Man hath not been compleat : For this is certain, In all Cases where God may, if He pleases, vouchsafe no Revelation at all, or defer the Time of giving it, there he may vouchsafe it, if granted, in any assignable Measure ;

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Measure; and the Reasons which will support the one, must, *a fortiori*, support the other likewise. A Revelation, we affirm, is expedient: But how? Not at all Times equally; nor yet to all Persons equally; If this be true of a Revelation in the general, then the Revelation of a compleat and perfect Scheme was not equally expedient at all Times. Or, if we should suppose, that the Knowledge of it would be equally useful at all Times, yet a great many other Circumstances must come into Consideration, which may serve to determine as well the Measure of Light proper to be vouchsafed, as the Time and Season of giving it.

1. Then, I affirm, that several Revelations in different Ages of the World, may be suited to the Condition and Exigences of the several Times. Thus, after the Flood, when one Family only was preserv'd, some general Rules, to be observ'd universally in future Times, might properly be given: For, as all the future Race of Men descended from this Family, such Rules, if few and simple, might be easily taught and retain'd. Agreeably, the Scripture teaches, that God delivered these Directions to *Noah* and his Sons; [See *Gen. 9.*] 1. That they might eat Flesh, as well as Vegetables. 2. That they should abstain from Blood. 3. That Murther should be punish'd with Death. To which was added a Promise, that the World should no more

be destroy'd by Water. These Things are distinctly mentioned: But who doth not see the Fitness of declaring these Particulars at such a Time as this? And, if Nothing else was Matter of Revelation at that Time, I may be allow'd to presume, Either that the Circumstances of Mankind did not make it needful; or else, that, in some respect or other, to us unknown, they would not admit of it.

Afterwards we find God was pleased to favour *Abraham* with some special Communications. These were in a good Measure personal, and intended to preserve one Family at least from the general Corruption. To this Purpose He was order'd to withdraw himself from his native Country, and settle at a Distance; to encourage him in which, he had the Promise of especial Favour from God. Here indeed we do not see any Points of Doctrine, or general Precepts deliver'd, for which there might be none Occasion. The Intent of Providence in this Case was, to preserve a good Man from Danger. This extraordinary Care might be built, not only on the great Virtue and Merit of the Man, but likewise on This, that perhaps the Family of *Abraham* might be the only one which remain'd untainted. This, at least, is certain, That, according to the Determinations of Providence, this Family was design'd to preserve the Knowledge of God, and to be in future Time the Instruments of a general Revelation.





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velation. This God afterwards declar'd, when he made him this Promise, *In thy Seed shall all the Nations of the Earth be blessed.* [Gen. xxii. 18.]

Let us pass on to the Revelation made by God to *Moses*. Here was a Body of Laws deliver'd; A System of moral Precepts, of religious Ceremonies, and of political Rules. Whether these were not highly proper, and agreeable to the Wants and Temper of the People concern'd in them, may appear, in a good measure, from considering their Circumstances: And, if every Thing may not be clear'd up this Way, we may conclude the Wisdom of each particular Branch from the appearing Wisdom of the Whole.

Notwithstanding this, our Author will, perhaps, insist, that, however suitable these several Revelations might be to the Times in which they were made, yet the Discovery of several other Matters might be equally suitable: And, if a Revelation be expedient, in the Sense we are contending for, then such a Revelation must be equally suitable to all Persons, and at all Times.

If this be alledg'd, it will be sufficient to reply, that some Things, which if deliver'd at one Time would not be receiv'd, may yet be admitted at another Time, after due Preparation made for them. This, I think, is so evident in other Cases, that it cannot, with any Shew, be disputed. It is daily seen  
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in the Study of the Arts and Sciences, and indeed in the Establishment of political Institutions : Why then may not the same be presum'd in the present Case ? Do we know the real State of Mankind in all Ages of the World so well, as to determine peremptorily that This was not the Case ? Is not the Supreme Judge and Governor of the World fitter to settle this Matter than we are ? If this be so, then the Objection before us is not drawn from the Nature of Things, but our own Ignorance.

I am farther confirm'd in the present Account from hence, That most of the Revelations formerly made were, in Truth preparatory to the Christian. They were either direct Promises that Something of this Kind should be hereafter given, or else they were in some other respects very proper Introductions of it : And therefore St. Paul asserts of the Jewish Religion, *That the Law was our School-master to bring us unto Christ.* [Gal. iii. 24.]

I shall pass from hence to the Third Branch of our Author's Objection ; If a Revelation be expedient, then, as it ought to be granted at all Times, and in the fullest Manner, so likewise to every Person alike. Not to one favourite Nation only, or to a small Part of Mankind, the Bulk of them to this Day remaining in deplorable Ignorance.

As to the Part which the Jews have in the present Objection, I have noted Something concerning

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concerning it before, when I observ'd, that, notwithstanding the Law deliver'd by *Moses* respected the Jews more immediately, yet it was not confin'd to them alone; and that probably a great Part of the World might receive no small Profit from it. There will be none Occasion that I should offer any Thing farther on that particular Case. The Objection, if there be any thing in it, bears full as hard on the Christian Revelation, which, 'tis own'd, hath not yet been receiv'd universally; and perhaps the far greater Part of the World are Strangers to it to this very Day. This deserves to be consider'd, and I shall make my Reply by the following Steps.

I. No Objection can be made against the Christian Revelation, from the mere Consideration of its not being *receiv'd* universally. No Force of Proof, no not Demonstration itself can prevail with every one. Men may shut their Eyes, and refuse to consider; and they will be dispos'd to do so, where irregular Passions shall render the Truths to be prov'd unacceptable. A Revelation therefore, however strong the Evidence of it may be, may be rejected. This cannot be otherwise, so long as human Freedom remains; so long as God deals with Men as rational Creatures, and does not force Proof upon them, whether they are willing to admit it or no. The Difficulty therefore arising from this Objection must rest, not on the imperfect Reception,

tion, but the imperfect Promulgation of the Gospel.

2. Let us observe, Secondly, That notwithstanding the Gospel hath not yet been promulgated universally, yet it shall one Time or other be offer'd to every one. Something of this Nature is intimated to us by our Blessed Lord himself, who declar'd, *Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the Time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* [Luke xxi, 24.] And more clearly by St. Paul, *I would not, Brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this Mystery, that Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the Fulness of the Gentiles be come in.* [Rom. xi, 25.] Upon this Foot we affirm, that the Gospel shall some Time or other be universally promulgated: And, consequently, no Objection can be drawn from this Circumstance, but what arises from the Novelty of the Revelation itself; which, if it be insufficient in the former Respect, it must equally be so in this.

3. If the Gospel shall hereafter be promulgated universally; then, as we know not how long this World shall last, we cannot say but this gradual Promulgation of the Gospel may bear a due Proportion to the Age and Continuance of the World. About Seventeen Hundred Years are already pass'd since the first Delivery of our Religion; and how many Ages more may be requir'd for its full Promulgation we know not. This Extent  
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of Time looks great in our Accounts of Things. But yet, if the World should continue for Millions of Ages, (as no Man can prove it shall not) Two or Three Thousand Years might be consider'd as Nothing. There is an Expression in Scripture, which contains deep Truth in it as well as Beauty. *One Day is with the Lord as a Thousand Years, and a Thousand Years as one Day.* It is built on this, that *Great* and *Small* are relative Terms, and depend on the Proportion which one Thing bears to another with which it is compar'd. The few Years of our Infancy might be thought a very considerable Time, were the ordinary Term of human Life much shorter ; whereas, upon the present State of Things, it appears otherwise. Let the Season of the present imperfect Promulgation of the Gospel be consider'd as the Infancy of the Christian State : In that View, no sufficient Objections can be rais'd, upon Supposition that it shall flourish for Millions of Ages in full Maturity ; none, but what may equally be urg'd against the State of Infancy in the Consideration of human Life.

4. Let us consider, Fourthly, that, at the first Publication of the Gospel, the Preachers of it were endued with several miraculous Powers, which serv'd them as well to spread and propagate this Religion, as to prove and support it. This was necessary at first, in order to give it a firm Footing, and to gain

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a sufficient Settlement. When this was done, as all was effected which necessarily requir'd a miraculous Power, so these extraordinary Powers ceased. When abundant Evidence had been given of this Religion, and it was embrac'd by a competent Number of Persons, it was left to make its Way by human Means. In these Circumstances, it is the Business of those who enjoy this Light, to impart it to others. Somewhat to this Purpose is attempted daily; and more would be, if that Spirit prevail'd with Us, which animated the first Propagators of Christianity. Yet, if all be not done which might and ought to be so, we alone are to blame; and the Objection rather lies against the Conduct of Men, than the Administrations of Providence. But,

5. The Circumstances of the World are such, that 'tis impossible to promulgate this Religion universally but by Length of Time, and slow Degrees. The Intercourse we have with many Heathen People is small; their Languages to us unknown; and, perhaps, so barren, many of them, as to want Improvement for the Conveyance of religious Notions. As the Ignorance of Heathens is great, so their Prejudices are great likewise; and, as they are utterly unacquainted with the Credit of those Histories on which the Evidence of the Christian Faith is built, so it cannot be any easy Matter to make a Progress in this Affair. The Conversion of Heathens therefore  
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REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 419

must be the Work of Time. A more free Inter-  
course with them must be open'd; Arts and  
Sciences cultivated; their Languages known  
and improv'd; And, as these Means are gra-  
dually carry'd on, we may hope for a Success  
proportionable.

Yet, however this be, I conceive, Lastly,  
the Conduct of the Supreme Being will be  
sufficiently justify'd from hence, That God  
will deal with Men in Proportion to the Ad-  
vantages they enjoy. \* They who are with-  
out this Law shall be judg'd without it, and  
they who enjoy this Law shall be judg'd by  
it. As therefore Men are not made account-  
able to God merely for not having it, so nei-  
ther can God be accountable for not granting  
it. His Proceedings in this respect are en-  
tirely in his own Power; And therefore, as  
he may bestow or not bestow a Revelation,  
as he pleases, so He is the most proper Judge  
When and to Whom to grant it. This Con-  
sideration is sufficient of itself, unless our  
Adversaries will undertake to prove, That  
the grand Scheme of Things, from the Be-  
ginning to the End, is entirely inconsistent  
with the making any Revelation at all;  
or the making it so late; or the making it  
gradually; or the promulgating it imper-  
fectly. For, if the doing all these be con-  
sistent with this great and wise Scheme, then  
a Revelation, under all the Circumstances  
objected against, there may be; and, if the

E c 2

Scheme

Will or Inclination

\* What is  
the difference  
between the  
Heathen who  
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proceeding  
are without  
this Law, and  
those who  
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lous, Belief  
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Scheme itself shall require it, then there must be.

The *second* Objection against the Expediency of a Revelation, which I propos'd to examine, was This; The Revelaton we are speaking of, hath not answer'd those Purposes for which we affirm it to have been expedient. It occurs, p. 404. "What impartial  
" Man, who hath compar'd the former and  
" present Condition of Mankind, can think  
" the World much mended since the Times  
" of *Tiberius*; or, tho' ever so well vers'd  
" in Church-History, can, from the Conduct  
" of Christians, find that they are arriv'd to  
" any higher State of Perfection than the  
" rest of Mankind, who are suppos'd to  
" continue in their Degeneracy and Corrup-  
" tion?" And afterwards; "What in most  
" Places passes for the Christian Religion,  
" if not the chiefest Part of it, has trans-  
" form'd this social and benign Creature  
" into one fierce and cruel; and made him  
" act with such Rage and Fury against those  
" who never did, nor design'd him any  
" Injury, as could not have enter'd into the  
" Hearts of Men to conceive, even though  
" they were in the unavoidable State of  
" Degeneracy and Corruption?" p. 405.

Our Author here asserts, 1. In general, That Christians are not at all better than Heathens. And, 2. That they are in some respects worse.

As

## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 421

As to what he asserts under the former Head, whether it relate to Heathens before the Times of *Tiberius*, or in the present Age, it might be sufficient to deny, as roundly as he affirms ; and to refer the Thing, without more Ado, to any impartial Considerer. Only this should be remember'd, That when we compare the Lives of Christians with the Lives of Heathens ; by Christian, we ought to understand, not those who are merely Nominal, without having any real Knowledge, or just Apprehensions of our Religion : And therefore we ought to strike out of the Account, 1. Those who have nothing else to shew for their Religion but their being baptiz'd. And, 2. Those who have corrupted our Religion in any notorious Degree. So far as Men alter Christianity, so far they cease to be Christians ; and consequently, those Faults which arise from Corruptions of this Kind, are not chargeable to the Account of our Religion. To which I may add farther, That in making the Comparison, we ought to consider Men as plac'd on an equal Foot in every other respect. A wise and learned Heathen may carry several Points farther than an illiterate, tho' well-meaning Christian. To come at the Truth, and to learn whether any Advantages have arisen from the Christian Institution, Let us see how Men behave in the general, under the several Persuasions of Heathenism and Christianity ; or, if par-



ticular Persons are to be compar'd, then let them be chosen fairly.

On these Conditions, I may trust the Cause to the Judgment of any impartial Man. Let him examine History, and determine upon the Point. This I may do, notwithstanding several worthy Persons have, in a Heat of Zeal, and to press Christians to a greater Circumspection, sometimes express'd themselves incautiously. Let our Author cite as many Passages of this Kind as he pleases, I shall yet maintain what I have asserted, as knowing from the Nature of Things, that the Point which he insists on is impossible.

For, let us consider; Have not Christians the same common Reason with Heathens? or, Does this Gentleman think that Infidels are the only Men of Sense? If this be the Case, then, as Christianity doth not impair their Reason, and as all the moral Conclusions of Reason are Parts of Christianity, and confirm'd by it, Both are so far as this upon the Level. But; when we consider, that many Things which are remotely concluded by Reason, are plainly laid down in the Scriptures; that others are there deliver'd, which cannot be concluded by our Reason at all; and that there are several Motives to a virtuous Life peculiar to Christianity; it will appear, that all other Things being equal, the Christian must as far exceed the Heathen, as Christian Light exceeds Heathen Light:



REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 423

Light : And to affirm the contrary, will imply the same as to affirm, that Unequals being added to Equals, the Produce will be Equal.

The Gentleman advances farther, and affirms, *2dly*, That Christians are in some respects worse than Heathens. But How doth he support this ? Why, by observing, " That what in most Places passes for the Christian Religion, if not the chiefest Part of it, has transform'd the social and benign Creature into one fierce and cruel," and, in short, made him act with such Rage and Fury as could not have enter'd into the Heart of an Heathen. But, is this asserted of pure, and genuine Christianity ? Are there any Precepts of Cruelty to be found in the Gospel ? On the contrary ; Are not Matters of Charity carry'd so far by it, that this very Gentleman complains of it on that very Account ? How then comes this Imputation to be insinuated against Real Christianity, which can only belong to Nominal ? His Words are ; " What passes for the Christian Religion, &c. " makes Men fierce." Be it so ; Christianity doth not effect this : But Christianity corrupted, or that which is not real Christianity, may do so. Pray, What Conclusion can be drawn from hence ? — That Christianity is mischievous ? No, certainly ; unless this Gentleman will charge all the

*This is a very weak passage, for upon what  
score may a State be better justified for  
opposing a Set of people than on such a  
score as* 424 *A DEFENCE of*

*naturally* Absurdities of abus'd and distorted Reason  
*tends to cause* to the Account of genuine, and well-con-  
*a Revolution* ducted Reason.

*my Govern:* Still our Gentleman will tell us, What  
*ment, & We* Good hath real Christianity done all this  
*have a R. R.* while, if it could not prevent such Cruelties  
*author y<sup>e</sup> B.* as mere uninstructed Reason must condemn;  
*of S. whose* if it could not hinder its Professors from act-  
*argum<sup>t</sup> a q;* ing worse than Heathens themselves have  
*against y<sup>e</sup> Non.* ever done? But will this Gentleman say,  
*jurors, di:* That no Cruelties were ever practis'd among  
*rectly justify* the Heathens? Or will he affirm, That  
*y<sup>e</sup> Civil Ma:* they were not so generally practis'd; or,  
*bestrate in* not to such a Degree? Surely, he can-  
*all such cases* not be so much a Stranger to the Ten Per-  
secutions; in which the Heathen Governors  
rag'd against their Christian Subjects, who  
had never done them any Injury, and upon  
no Score whatsoever but their professing  
a Religion different from the establish'd.

*What do  
this Gent<sup>l</sup>  
think of the  
Spanish  
Butcherys  
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that wantonly and  
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upon a poor innocent Creature  
receiv'd more abominable  
kindness & Humanity,  
which, being so contrary  
Nature, can only  
be accounted for on y<sup>e</sup> supposition  
that their Religion had eff*

*What do* \* No Persecutions of Christians which have  
*this Gent<sup>l</sup>* happen'd since can over-match these; And  
*think of the* therefore it cannot be affirm'd, that those  
*Spanish* who are call'd Christians, have in this respect  
*Butcherys* outdone those who were real Heathens.  
*in America* After all, It is too true, and must not be  
*where at* deny'd, that most horrid Cruelties have  
*most as* sometimes been practis'd by Persons pro-  
*many people* fessing Christianity, and perhaps under Pre-  
*were des:* tence of Zeal for their Religion. But, can it  
*destroy'd as is* be concluded from hence, that Christianity  
*contain'd in* hath done no Good? If it cannot fully  
*all Europe, and* work

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*receiv'd more abominable*  
*kindness & Humanity,*  
*which, being so contrary*  
*Nature, can only*  
*be accounted for on y<sup>e</sup> supposition*  
*that their Religion had eff*



## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 425

work its proper Effects upon all Men, must it therefore be entirely fruitless? No, certainly: All that can be justly infer'd, is This; Some Persons may corrupt themselves to such a Degree, as to make their Cure desperate: Such may receive little Benefit from the Religion they profess. But let me ask, Would these Men be less degenerate in a State of Heathenism? Would an ill-natur'd and cruel Man find none Occasions of Mischief, unless the Considerations of Religion supply'd them? This cannot be said: Why then must our Religion be accus'd, for not doing that, which cannot be effected by any Cause whatsoever, which doth not destroy Mens Liberty?

Upon the Whole, Let the Faults of Christians be aggravated as much as this Gentleman pleases; yet still I am perswaded, where Christianity hath any tolerable Footing, Men will be found not only to think more justly, but to act more virtuously, than an equal Number of Men have been found to do in the Heathen World. His Accusations are founded on a Falsity in Fact; and consequently, cannot affect the Cause of Christianity at all.

### CHAP.

*effaced the natural dictates of pity  
to their fellow creatures and  
benefactors — my Lord: Bacon I remember  
of this subject & quoting that noble  
oration of Lucretius, Tantum Religio posuit  
Morum: ask but what would a paet have  
done on a massacre of Paris or a Spanish cruelty?*





## C H A P. IX.

*Whether there be sufficient Evidence of  
the Reality of a Revelation, and  
especially of the Christian.*



SHALL introduce what may be proper to be offer'd on this Question, with observing, That if the several Points already insisted on are made good ; and especially, if, considering the Condition of Human Nature, an extraordinary Revelation of the Divine Will be expedient ; then one or other of the following Conclusions may be drawn ; Either, 1. That such a Revelation hath already been granted us in Fact : Or else, 2. If Nothing of this Kind hath been granted hitherto, yet we may reasonably hope and expect it in some future Time.

I do by no means determine absolutely for the former ; nor argue, that because a Revelation may have been highly useful and desirable,

desirable, therefore the Reality of a past Revelation may certainly be concluded. I am sensible this would run me on Difficulties, and oblige me to maintain the absolute Necessity of a Revelation on God's Part. On this Supposition it will be impossible to avoid the Consequence which our Author alledges, that a Revelation must be universal.

I contend therefore, from the Consideration before us, for no more than This; That probably a Divine Revelation either hath been already, or will be hereafter granted us: And therefore, as this is, in a reasonable Account of Things, probable, it becomes every Man to examine the Pretences to it impartially. Were the Thing in itself impossible; or, tho' not absolutely impossible, yet highly improbable; it might be thought there would be none Occasion to examine such Pretences at all: Then every Thing of this Kind might be rejected at once, as offering a manifest Affront to our Reason. But since the Case is otherwise; Since Probability lies on the other Side of the Question; To be entirely careless, is inexcusable: For it expresses a Contempt of that Being, whose Will we are concern'd as well to learn, as to obey.

Over and above what hath been just now observ'd, I might go on, and alledge some presumptive Proofs, that God hath not left Men entirely to themselves; that he hath  
given



given them some Prescriptions in an extraordinary Way ; or, in other Words, that some Divine Revelation hath been granted Men already : Which if it shall appear to be extremely probable, then the Way will be clear'd to those Arguments by which we support our Religion ; For, if a Revelation be allow'd in some Instances, What Prejudices can arise against granting it in others ?

It will be needless to alledge every Thing which might be pertinently offer'd to this Purpose. However, not to let this Matter pass entirely, I shall take the Liberty to demand, How we can account for the Origine of Sacrifices ? Of these there have indeed been different Sorts, and attended with different Ceremonies, agreeable to the Humour of the several Persons who have offer'd them. Yet it is remarkable, that 'till *Jesus Christ* appear'd, (who, in our Account of Things, answer'd the Intent of all Sacrifices by the Sacrifice of himself), I say, 'till this Time, scarce any Place or Age can be assign'd, in which some Sacrifices, of one Kind or other, have not been offer'd.

But Whence, I desire to know, could this arise ? Was it from the Nature and Reason of the Thing ? This will not be affirm'd by the Gentleman I am contending with, who would represent the Practice as ridiculous. Here indeed I must differ from him widely ; For I cannot see that there is any  
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## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 419

Absurdity in the Matter ; any Thing contrary to the Principles of Reason. But still, Would mere Reason have led Men to it ? Would it have taught them that This was the only, or the best Method of Propitiating the Deity ; and consequently, that the making these Offerings was a necessary and indispensable Duty ? If not, then How came it pass that this Institution should prevail universally ?

We shall be told perhaps, It was the Invention of Priests, who made great Advantages to themselves from Sacrifices. Yet still the Difficulty will return, How came it to pass that all Priests, in almost all Parts and Ages of the World, have enter'd into this Method ? Could Nothing else be invented of as gainful a Nature ? Or was this Method more plain and obvious than any other ?

Let us turn the Matter which Way we please, it will be scarce possible to solve the Difficulty but by supposing, that this Practice arose originally from some Divine Appointment. This will clear up all at once. In this Case, what was made known by Revelation to the first Man, would be practis'd by him with Care : His Children would be taught to worship God this Way : The Practice, thus taught, would be retain'd for Substance, into whatever distant Parts of the World they should remove : And, tho' in Tract of  
Time

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Time great Corruptions might happen, and many Variations be made from the original Institution, yet the more general Parts of the Institution might remain: Sacrifices might be offer'd every-where, and be reckon'd, (as in Fact they have been), one of the principal Parts of Worship. I cannot forbear alledging this as a presumptive Evidence of a Revelation; because the Universality of Sacrifices is much better accounted for this Way, than by referring the Matter to the Dictates of Reason, or the Artifice of Priests.

Some Revelation then probably hath been: But the Argument now produc'd concludes for no other than a Revelation as to one particular Instance: This indeed falls vastly short of the Point I am contending for; and therefore must be only consider'd as Preparatory to my main Design.

The great Question which I have all along had in View, and which is here to be consider'd distinctly, is, Whether the Religion we embrace be really founded on a Divine Revelation: Whether *Jesus Christ* were a Person sent from God, or not: and consequently, Whether the Scheme of Doctrines and Precepts deliver'd by him ought to be receiv'd on the Foot of a Divine Authority.

To determine This, Writers have frequently taken the following Method, *viz.* To consider, 1. The Internal Evidence of the

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the Religion. And, 2. The External Proof by which it is confirm'd.

As to the former Head, I conceive, the Terms in which it is express'd are not quite so proper; and that for this Reason, because; strictly speaking, there can be no *internal Evidence* of a Revelation at all. For, I would desire to know, What can be concluded from the Nature of any Doctrines or Precepts deliver'd? Why, This only, That they are Either true or false; and if true, that it must be the Will of God they should be receiv'd as such. Be it so; yet doth it follow from hence, they must therefore be reveal'd? No, certainly: Several of the same Points which are inculcated in the Gospels, are contain'd likewise in the Writings of the Philosophers. The internal Evidence of their Truth must be the same in both: But were they equally reveal'd to both Kinds of Writers? No; The one learn'd them from Divine Revelation; the other from Principles of human Reason: The One produce full Proof a Divine Commission; the Other alledge nothing of that Kind at all. Upon this I must affirm, that external Proof is the only direct Evidence of a Revelation; and that all Conclusions drawn from the Nature of the several Doctrines or Precepts amount to nothing more than a Condition, or *Causa sine qua non*, as being

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as being that without which no external Evidence should be admitted.

To proceed; There is nothing in the Christian Scheme which makes it absolutely impossible to be true; It contains nothing inconsistent with itself, or contradictory to any sure Principle of Reason. If it did, no external Evidence would be sufficient. What is false in itself, cannot be prov'd true by any Arguments whatsoever: And therefore, were any Things of this Kind produc'd, we should be forc'd to maintain, Either that the Points alledg'd were Corruptions of Christianity; — or, if this might not be suppos'd, That the Religion itself was an Imposture. For, no Man can have greater Evidence that any Miracles have been ever wrought, than he hath already, that a Religion which contains Contradictions must be false.

But Nothing of this Kind can be charg'd on our Religion. It proposes to us the noblest End; and the most suitable Means. Its Doctrines have all of them an Influence upon our Practice. And the Precepts which it delivers, are either founded on the Natures of Things; or, if some few of them are positive, they are far from being useless. Those Points which are proveable from Principles of Natural Light, can create no Difficulty; and Others, concerning which Nothing can be determin'd from thence, may (for any Thing we know) be true. To which may be

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be added, That as the several Particulars of our Religion, separately taken, are unexceptionable, so there is such an Harmony and Correspondency of its Parts, as makes the whole Scheme beautiful.

If then the Matter of our Religion be such, as makes it capable of external Proof, we are concern'd to Enquire What Proof of that Kind it has. Now the Evidence to be produc'd is that of Miracles; From which I do by no means exclude Prophecies, which may be consider'd as one Sort of Miracles: They exceed any Powers of human Nature; and have just the same Force in Proof as other Miracles have, *viz.* as being supernatural Attestations of a Divine Commission. This therefore being the Foundation on which I build, it will be proper that I should enquire,

1. Whether any Miracles have been really wrought in Favour of our Religion. And,
2. What Force there is in the Argument deduc'd from thence.

Before I proceed to the particular Discussion of the first Question, I must clear the Way, by removing such Prejudices as may be suppos'd to lie against this Kind of Proof. The Gentleman I am contending with laughs at Miracles, and would repreient every Thing of that Nature as ridiculous. To this Purpose, he tells us, " It was a proverbial Saying among the



“ sophers of Greece, *Θαυμάσια λόγοις*, Mi-  
 “ racles for Fools, and Reasons for Wise  
 “ Men. The *Bæotians* were remarkable for  
 “ their Stupidity, and the Number of their  
 “ Oracles : And if you look no farther than  
 “ the Christian World, you will find that  
 “ Ignorance, and the Belief of daily Mi-  
 “ racles, go hand in hand ; and that there  
 “ is nothing too absurd for the Peoples  
 “ Belief.” p. 192.

The Gentleman hath here express'd a great Contempt of Miracles : *Miracles* (says he) *for Fools*. Which Words, tho' cited from some of the Greek Philosophers, he makes his own by the Application. And if we demand what Reason he alledges for this Proceeding, the Answer is, Weak Men are frequently impos'd on, and apt to take those Things for Miracles, which are only Cheats. But, what then? Must this pass for a Reason; and can there be no real Miracles, because some Men will be apt to credit feign'd ones? No, certainly; and therefore, if the Gentleman be really in earnest, he must build on one or other of these Principles; Either, 1. That Miracles are absolutely and in themselves impossible; or else, 2. That there can be no sufficient Cause or Reason for working them.

Miracles are supernatural Effects; *i.e.* such as being above the natural Powers of any visible Agents, or evidently not produc'd

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duc'd by them, are contrary to the general Laws of God's acting upon Matter, or at least cannot be accounted for by any Composition or Result of those Laws. The Question therefore at present, is This; Whether Effects of this Kind are absolutely impossible. If they are so, they must imply a Contradiction; and it concerns our Adversaries to shew Where the Contradiction lies. Is there any Inconsistency in affirming, that Effects above the Powers of visible Agents may yet be perform'd by invisible; or, that Effects may be produc'd without any visible Means at all; or, that the general Laws of Nature may be suspended or controul'd; or lastly, that Things may be done which cannot be accounted for by any Composition or Result of those Laws? Can any one prove that there are no invisible Beings? or, if there be, that they enjoy no Powers beyond human? or, that they cannot exert these Powers in the Affairs of the World? If any of these Positions could be prov'd, we must then yield our Point: But if the contrary may be true, then Miracles may be wrought; and of the Possibility of this we have as clear an Idea, as we have of any ordinary Effect whatsoever.

Miracles, I have said, are such Effects, as are either contrary to the general Laws of God's acting upon Matter, or cannot result from them. If this Account be true,

the Possibility of Miracles must be apparent: For, if the Laws of Nature are none other than the general Method of God's acting upon Matter, which Method is not in itself, and absolutely necessary; then 'tis certain God may either suspend his Action entirely, or act, upon particular Emergencies, in whatever different Manner he pleases. Upon this View, it is clear, that the working of Miracles may not require in the Supreme Being the Exertion of any greater Power than what is necessary in ordinary Operations; and consequently, we may conclude the Possibility of supernatural Effects, from the Certainty of natural.

To this may be added, That forasmuch as Miracles do not necessarily imply infinite Power; and we know not what Degrees of Power God may have bestow'd on several created Beings, we cannot affirm that the working of Miracles is impossible even to them. Only we must remember, that whatever Privileges they enjoy in this respect, they are still subject to The Supreme Being, and limited in the Exercise of them by his Will. From whence it follows, that no Confusions will arise from hence: The Administration of Things may still be God's; and the Force of Miracles the same, as tho' they were produc'd by an immediate Divine Power.

If therefore Miracles are not absolutely impossible, we are concern'd to Enquire farther, Whether any sufficient Reason can be assign'd for working them. This is the more necessary to be done, because I am apprehensive our Adversaries build more on this Head than the former. They must suppose that Miracles are Either prejudicial, or useless; and therefore, inconsistent with Goodness in the one Case, and with Wisdom in the other.

It cannot be asserted that Miracles are prejudicial, without maintaining that such Effects are mischievous in themselves or Consequences. The former we deny; because, if Good may be produc'd in an ordinary Way, it may certainly be as well produc'd in an extraordinary; — and the latter, because, however true it be in some Cases, that a present Advantage may be overballanc'd by future ill Consequences, yet this is not absolutely and universally necessary. Tho' upon the Whole, the present Scheme of Things is best, and any new Laws might be less useful than those which obtain already; yet it cannot be affirm'd, that to suspend or counter-act these Laws in any particular Instances, must be mischievous. To do this, may possibly be of singular Use on some Occasions; and it hath been presum'd, that certain Irregularities which arise from the present Constitution, (no doubt, the wisest



upon the whole) may be corrected by occasional Interpositions.

The Natural Good of the World is, I conceive, secure from any Prejudice on Account of Miracles: Let us see therefore, whether any Moral Advantages may be deriv'd from them. If there may, then Miracles may be useful; then Reasons may be assign'd for working them; and consequently, To explode them universally, and to make them the Subject of Ridicule, (as this Gentleman has done) is, to say the least, rash and unwarrantable.

Common Appearances, and the ordinary Course of Things, according to the present Constitution, are a strong Argument for a Providence; because, without this Supposition, we shall be unable to account for those Things which we see daily. This, to a Thoughtful and Wise Man, may be sufficient; and, consequently, extraordinary Admonitions unnecessary. But the Generality of the World are less affected by them. They are not apt to reflect and consider, or to give any Attention to Matters familiar. Yet, when any Thing very unusual happens, the Surprise which it occasions engages them. Things out of the Way, and which cannot be perform'd by Men, will be ascrib'd to God. Those who overlook'd his Power in the common Administrations of Providence, will acknowledge it here; and, from hence become more deeply sensible of their Dependance

dance on him, and Obligations to him. Still Miracles will carry a greater Weight, if they shall prove either the Rewards of Virtue, or the Punishments of Vice; if they shall bring any extraordinary Advantages to the Good, or unusual Calamities on the Wicked. This will alarm them to the Purpose, and go much farther towards the Support of Virtue than any Methods merely human can do. I do not, by any Means, affirm how far Miracles have been wrought in Fact, for the End now alledg'd by me; tho' perhaps more frequently than every one is willing to allow. It is enough to assert, that the Case is in itself possible; For, if it be, then Miracles are not absolutely ridiculous.

However, the principal Thing I am concern'd to note is This; Miracles may be proper to confirm the Authority of that Person who is commission'd to declare God's Will. That 'tis possible for the Supreme Being to reveal himself immediately, shall be here assum'd, because it hath been already shewn elsewhere; and, that the Knowledge attainable by this Means may be serviceable, as well to Mankind in general, as to any one single Person, will be readily admitted, and needs no Proof. Upon this Foot I demand, whether it be necessary that this Revelation be immediately made to every one? This cannot be affirm'd, if the Knowledge of it may be communicated

to others, and sufficient Evidence of a Divine Commission given. For, no one Kind of Means can be affirm'd to be necessary, where the End may be obtain'd by some other Means. Well then; Immediate Revelation is possible; This Revelation made to One may be design'd for the Benefit of Others; The Matter of it may be communicated; and sufficient Evidence of a Divine Commission given: But how shall it be given? Certainly by some supernatural Operations, *i. e.* by Miracles of one Kind or other; For Nothing can be Proof of a Divine Commission but Divine Credentials. If therefore Miracles are proper for this End; and the End itself be entirely worthy of God; it remains, that there may be a reasonable Cause of working them; and that they may, (notwithstanding this Gentleman's Greek Proverb) be applied as convincing Arguments to wise Men.

I shall now pass on to the great Question before propos'd, *viz.* Whether any Miracles have been really wrought in Favour of our Religion; And this will farther resolve itself into Two other Questions; 1. Whether the Histories from whence we draw our Facts are credible; And 2. Whether the Facts there recorded are Miraculous.

The Histories I have now in View are, The Accounts given us of the Life and Actions of *Jesus Christ* contain'd in the *Four Gospels*, and of the Conduct of The Apostles deliver'd in



## REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 441

in the *Acts*. In reference to which, it will not be disputed by our Adversaries, Whether there was ever such a Person as *Jesus Christ*; — Whether He did not claim the Title of *Messias*; — Whether He did not, under that Character, give out Laws, and institute a Religion; — Whether He did not gather a considerable Number of Followers, from whom He chose some, who were principally employ'd by him to propagate his Religion. These Points I shall lay down as indisputable: So that if the Accounts given us concerning the Lives and Actions of *Christ* and his Apostles should be thought questionable for some particular Reasons, yet the general Foundation of them is absolutely unquestionable. To this may be added, That the Histories before us are not the Forgeries of later Ages, but of great Antiquity, and as old as we Christians pretend they are, may be prov'd in every Way which is allow'd to establish the Antiquity of any other Books. They have approv'd themselves, in this respect, to all critical Enquirers: And therefore, if our Adversaries will, notwithstanding this, question the Point, They should tell us When, and by whom these Books were forg'd; or, at least, produce some Arguments, from the Nature and Texture of the Books themselves, to prove the Forgery. Nothing of this Kind hath yet been done by them, as I am persuaded Nothing can be done by them.

We

We should observe, in the next Place, That the Persons who wrote these Histories were sufficiently qualified for the Undertaking; I mean, That they had all the Advantages which any Historians ever had, of knowing whether the Matters they related had any sufficient Foundation in Fact. For, they wrote Accounts of what is said to have happen'd in their own Times; They were Natives of, and resided in the very Country where the Affairs they relate were transacted. And, in many Particulars, they affirm what they were themselves Witnesses to. In such Circumstances as these, they must either be fully assur'd concerning what they wrote, or have been guilty of such Negligence as cannot be imputed to a serious and considering Man. So far as this goes, few Writers have ever equal'd them, and None exceeded them.

But, our Adversaries will tell us, The Question doth not rest here. They will admit perhaps, some of them at least, that they knew what they were about; and insist, that they were crafty Impostors, who design'd to support a false Religion by false Relations. This bears hard on their moral Character, and we are concern'd to examine it.

But, is there any Evidence for this? Hath it been prov'd, that these Writers were infamous Persons, and such as could not be credited in common Affairs? Nothing of this appears; Nothing to the Disadvantage of  
any

# REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 443

any of the Apostles but what they themselves have confess'd ingenuously. Methinks This should be allow'd some Weight, that, in writing these Accounts, they did not so much as conceal their own Infirmities.

Yet our Adversaries pretend to take Advantage from hence. The Gentleman I am contending with demands, " Do we not find  
 " one of the Apostles, tho' with the rest he  
 " had the Power of doing Miracles, even to  
 " the raising of the Dead, betraying his  
 " Master for the paltry Sum of Thirty Pieces  
 " of Silver? and the other Apostles not only  
 " fled and deserted him, but the chief of  
 " them forswore him as often as he was ask'd  
 " about being one of his Followers: And  
 " He, as well as *Barnabas*, was afterwards  
 " guilty of a mean Piece of Dissimulation;  
 " And *Paul* and *Barnabas* had such a sharp  
 " Contention, tho' about a very indifferent  
 " Matter, as to cause a Separation. And  
 " even St. *Paul* says, *The Good that I would,*  
 " *I do not; but the Evil which I would not, that*  
 " *I do. But I see another Law in my Members*  
 " *warring against the Law of my Mind, and*  
 " *bringing me into Captivity to the Law of*  
 " *Sin which is in my Members.* Do not these  
 " Instances, tho' many more might be added,  
 " plainly shew that inspir'd Persons — are  
 " subject to the same Passions, even to Dis-  
 " sembling and Lying, as other Men? "

p. 245. This is alledg'd to discredit the first  
 Propagators



Propagators of our Religion, who (as he insists) ought to have been both infallible and impeccable. [See p. 243.]

Upon this Passage I must observe, that it doth not directly affect the Point I am upon. I am here concern'd to justify the Character of the Gospel Historians, and to shew that they were Persons who related Matters fairly, according to what they either knew or believed. Supposing therefore, they had recorded much greater Faults in the Conduct of those Persons they wrote of, What, I desire, could be concluded from thence? That the Historians deserv'd no Credit? I should be tempted to think the contrary, from the Freedom they us'd in the Instances before us. It is reckon'd in all other Writers a Sign of Impartiality, that they record as well the Errors as Virtues of their Friends.

However, thus much I shall acknowledge readily, that, as the Credibility of our Revelation depends on the Evidence of those Facts by which it is supported, so 'tis necessary, not only that the Historians must have been faithful, but the Witnesses they cite credible; and therefore, if they have really given such Accounts of these Witnesses as shall overthrow their Evidence, the Cause of our Religion must suffer by the very Credit we allow to these Historians. This makes it necessary that we examine carefully the Characters of these Witnesses.

And

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And here I can by no means agree with this Gentleman, that the first Propagators of our Religion ought to have been infallible and impeccable. If we consider them only as Witnesses to Fact, (as that is the proper Consideration at present) we may put them on the same Foot as any other Witnesses; in whom we do not require an absolute Infallibility, to gain them Credit. It is sufficient, if, all Circumstances laid together, we may fairly conclude they were not deceiv'd in Fact: And, if this be not allow'd, then farewell to all human Testimony whatsoever. Nor is it any more necessary they should be impeccable. The Question arising on this Occasion must be, not Whether the Witnesses produc'd were absolutely incapable of deceiving; (This cannot be prov'd demonstrably of any mere Man) but whether they were Persons of a general good Character; and Whether there be sufficient Appearances of Fairness in what they testify. Let us see therefore, Whether, from the Instances produc'd by this Author, any Thing can be concluded which will destroy the general Credit of these Witnesses.

The Instance of Judas, who betray'd his Master, is of no Consequence here: For, tho' He, with the rest of the Apostles, was endu'd with a Power of working Miracles, yet it does not appear he was inspir'd, as this Gentleman is pleas'd to intimate: He was indeed

*What is not  
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of working  
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Inspiration*



indeed chosen originally, as the rest were, to bear Witness to *Christ*; But he forfeited this Honour by his Perfidy: And it will be Time enough for our Adversaries to alledge his Miscarriages, when they find we build any Thing on his Evidence.

The other Persons here accused are, The Disciples, who deserted our Saviour in his Extremities; St. *Peter*, who deny'd him; *Barnabas*, who is charg'd with Dissimulation in one Instance, and with Contention in another; and, lastly, St. *Paul*, who is represented as drawing his own Character in a very disadvantageous Manner.

It is affirm'd by St. *Matthew*, that *the Disciples forsook their Lord, and fled*. But doth this prove them to have been profligate and infamous Persons? Is there any more in the Case than This; that, upon a very trying Occasion, they were over-born by the Sense of Fear, as most other Persons would probably have been in the same Circumstances? Yet afterwards, when they recover'd themselves, and had receiv'd the last Assurances of *Christ's Messiahship* by his Resurrection from the Dead, these same Persons behav'd themselves with the greatest Resolution imaginable. Methinks This should be allow'd to be a stronger Argument in their Favour, than the having once betray'd a Fear can be against them.



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As little Stress can be laid on the Conduct of St. Peter and Barnabas in the Instance which this Gentleman calls a Piece of mean Diffimulation. The Case in short was This; The Apostle had convers'd freely with the Gentiles; *But when certain came from James, he withdrew, and separated himself, fearing them which were of the Circumcision*, [Gal. ii. 12.] He was conscious of his Christian Liberty, and had on former Occasions shewn it; But, being apprehensive of giving the Jews Offence, he chose rather to throw up his Liberty than to use it. This might have been attended with disadvantageous Consequences; However, since there appears no Dishonesty in the Case, the Apostle, whose Conduct was justifiable in the general, may surely claim some Excuse.

St. Barnabas stands on much the same Foot with St. Peter, as to the foregoing Objection: But it seems there is another Charge brought against him, in which St. Paul likewise hath a Share. It relates to a Difference between these Two Persons, where *the Contention was so sharp that they parted*. But, hath the Gentleman never heard of a Misunderstanding between great and good Men? or, doth he think they must immediately forfeit their Character on such Occasions? And what, after all, was the Matter of this Difference? Why This; The One insisted to take *Mark* with them, which the Other refus'd absolutely.



solutely. The Thing itself was Matter of Discretion: About which tho' they happen'd to differ, yet it doth not appear that the Contention was criminal. Let the Gentleman make the most of this, and see whether it will affect the moral Character either of *Paul* or *Barnabas*.

The great Charge on *St. Peter* bears harder: He was forewarn'd of his Danger, repeated his Denial, and confirm'd it with Oaths. The Crime itself must not be excus'd. But, shall One great Fault, committed under the Influence of strong Temptations, render a Man infamous for ever? Can Nothing be done to repair the Miscarriage, and to recover the good Opinion of the World? If Something may, then let us remember that this unhappy Person recollected himself immediately; lamented his Crime bitterly; labour'd afterwards with singular Zeal in propagating the Gospel; and at length laid down his Life for it. What surer Signs of Repentance can be given than these?

As to what the Gentleman affirms *St. Paul* declares, *Rom. vii. 19.* by which he would intimate that the Apostle is there drawing his own Character, I must observe, that this is such a monstrous Misrepresentation of the Apostle as can admit of no Excuse whatsoever. Doth not *St. Paul*, in several other Parts of his Writings, insist on the Strictness of his past Life, and call upon the Jews as Wit-  
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nesses of what he affirm'd? How then is it credible, that this same Person should afterwards draw his own Character in a Manner so disadvantageous? But the Gentleman will demand, Are not these St. Paul's own Words, *The Good that I would, I do not; but the Evil which I would not, that I do.* — *I see another Law in my Members warring against the Law of my Mind, and bringing me into Captivity to the Law of Sin, which is in my Members?* They are so; But the Words are clearly accounted for by Dr. Sam. Clark, in his Eighth Volume of Sermons, p. 188. "This whole Seventh Chapter to the *Romans* is plainly intended of a Person, in his Profession not yet Christian, and in his Life vicious: Which, tho' possibly it might be equally the Case either of a Jew or a Heathen; yet, because the Apostle is here more particularly directing his Discourse to those of his own Nation, the *Jews*, for this Reason, I suppose, it is, that, according to his usual Method of giving them as little Offence as possible, he introduces his Discourse in the first Person, v. 5. *When we (We unconverted Jews) were in the Flesh, the Motions of Sin — did work in our Members.*"

Hitherto Nothing hath appear'd to discredit either the Witnesses or the Historians of these Facts. Yet this is not all we have to say for them; There are several other Circumstances



cumstances of singular Advantage in their Favour.

We must observe then, that as Men, they were govern'd by the common Principles of human Nature; and consequently, were under the same Influences of Hope and Fear, as other Men are. Can it then be suppos'd, they would either contrive or concur in such an Imposture, without any apparent Advantage? Could they hope to better their Condition this Way, whilst all Power was in the Hands of their Adversaries, and which they knew would be employ'd against them in full Rigour? Were they taught by their Master to entertain any temporal Expectations? On the contrary, Did he not tell them plainly, *If they would follow him, they must take up the Cross; — That in this World they must expect Tribulation; and that the Time was coming, when whosoever killed them should think he did God Service?* Had not their Master himself been murthered? and could They expect better Treatment, whilst they reproach'd the Jews with Injustice and Cruelty in killing him? Nay, were they not in Fact *persecuted from City to City*; and were not Matters carried against them to such Extremities, that but one single Person of all the Apostles escap'd a violent Death? But, Whence did all this Hatred and Persecution arise? Why, from hence, That they endeavour'd to support a new Religion by the

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the Facts they affirm'd. Could they have been prevail'd with to detect the Cheat, or to have unsaid what they had preach'd, or to have been silent on that Head, they might have obtain'd any Advantages they could desire. But had this any Effect on them? No: They still went on courageously, *and rejoyced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake.* Upon this, without alledging numberless other Considerations to the same Purpose, I may affirm, That no Writers in any Age, have ever given equal Proofs of Sincerity.

There is but One Way of evading this Evidence, *viz.* by affirming, that these Writers were Enthusiasts, *i. e.* Mad-men; and, as such, capable of believing any Thing which favour'd the great Point they were possess'd with. This may be affirm'd: But is there any sufficient Ground to affirm it? Did these Persons betray any Thing of this Kind in their ordinary Life and Character? Did they not support a rational Scheme of Duty by the Facts they alledg'd; a Scheme, which the very Gentleman I am contending with, owns to be rational as to the Main? Did they not behave with singular Discretion upon almost every trying Occasion? And are these the Marks of Enthusiasm? If not, I may conclude, that this is a Supposition made purely because Men have Nothing else to say.

*\* A Man indeed might justly be thought that should appeal to y<sup>e</sup> Senses of a number of people for y<sup>e</sup> Truth of a Fact that had no existence* 452

## A DEFENCE of

*but let him with a few confederate importots observing a distance of 30 or 40 years from y<sup>e</sup> first hour Wonder-strode themselves properly & act in concert in their Religion & they wil find credulous people eno to listen & whether it be delivered orally or in Writing y<sup>e</sup> Savona Legends apropos*

The Point I am upon will be farther supported, by considering some collateral Evidences. To this Purpose it may be noted, That as the Facts related are said to have been preach'd every-where immediately after the Ascension of *Christ*, so the Histories we are speaking of were written and publish'd in the very same Age; To which may be added another Circumstance of no inconsiderable Moment, viz. That many of the Facts are said to have been done publicly, in the Presence of Numbers, as well Enemies as Friends. \* But, would any Men have been so senseless as to have affirm'd Matters of such a Nature, and under these Circumstances, had there been nothing at all of Truth in them? Would they have publish'd to the World such Accounts of Things, at a Time, and in a Place, where the Falshood might have been easily detected? Or, if they had been Fools enough to do this, would they have affirm'd that many of these Facts were notorious, when it was in the Power of numberless People then alive to have contradicted them? Or, if they had been so far infatuated as to run this Risk, Is it possible that no One Person should ever discover the Imposture? Were the *Jews* so very negligent in a Point which concern'd their Religion so nearly, and affected the Honour of their Nation so much? No doubt but Curiosity must have led some, and Zeal others,

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others, to examine these Matters to the Bottom. But did they, after all, discover the Cheat? Nothing of this appears: The *Jews* have no Accounts which contradict the Gospel History: There are no Records of any Kind to oppose it: So that whatever is affirm'd by our Adversaries in Opposition to this History, is affirm'd by them without any manner of Ground, and purely the Effect of their own unjust Suspicions.

It is farther worth while to consider, that the very Narrations themselves are such, as are apt to give them Credit, and what we should allow a just Weight in any other Writers. There appears nothing of Artifice in the Stories: They are plain and simple, and the Accounts such as might be expected to be given of real Facts by honest and well-meaning Men. There are Four different Writers of the History of *Christ*. These have vary'd somewhat from each other, and given us Accounts which are not exactly the same. But are these Differences such as shall impair their Credit? Are these Historians found contradicting each other plainly? Do the main Facts related by any one, directly overthrow the Facts mention'd by any other? Is there any other Difference between them, than would be found in the Accounts of any four honest Men who should be examin'd about the same Affairs? These very Differences, methinks,



heighten their Credit, and prove that they did not write in Concert. After all, Have not most of these Differences been fairly accounted for? and if some Differences still remain, May it not be presum'd rather that we want some Helps towards clearing them up, than that they are absolutely insuperable?

I am the more strongly induc'd to presume something of this Kind, from considering, that if there had been no sufficient Foundation for what these Writers have affirm'd, they could not possibly have gain'd such Credit, and made such a vast Number of Profelytes. We read, that within a few Days after the Ascension of Christ, the Apostles *being endued with Power from on High*, preach'd *Jesus*, and confirm'd what they preach'd *with Signs and Wonders*; immediately upon which Multitudes were converted. It appears from several following Writers, as well Heathen as Christian, that in a short Time the Christian Religion spread itself thro' most Parts of the *Roman Empire*: Persons of every Rank and Perswasion embrac'd it; and this, notwithstanding it met with all possible Discouragement from the Civil Power. But whence could this arise? Certainly from the Evidence of the Things alledg'd: Can we think they never enquir'd about these Matters; or, that they gave in to this Belief, without any sufficient Assurance about them? This must have been  
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more extraordinary than the very Miracles they believ'd. In short, *had this Counsel or this Work been of Men, it must have come to nought ; but because it was of God, therefore no human Force could overthrow it.*

This leads me to the next Question I propos'd to consider, *viz.* Whether the Facts recorded in these Histories were truly and properly miraculous.

It would be endless to insist distinctly on each of those extraordinary Facts which are represented in the Gospels : I shall only note in general, That all manner of Diseases, even the most inveterate, were cured instantly, by a Touch, by a Word speaking, and at a Distance ; That the Dead were rais'd to Life ; and that, on a sudden, Men who had been bred in a low Way, and were known to be illiterate, became perfectly acquainted with all Kinds of Languages. Facts of these Kinds must be allow'd to be miraculous, if they are free from all Suspicion of Cheat, and shewn to be unaccountable by any natural Powers.

If there were any Thing of Cheat in the Case, then, from the very Nature of the Thing, there must have been a great Number of Accomplices. The Disciples doubtless were concern'd ; The Persons on whom these Facts are said to have been wrought, must likewise have been interested ; And, when we consider that many of the Diseases



\* on this Subject I would be content to  
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said to have been cured, were inveterate and  
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Party among the Spectators. Had Things  
of this Kind been done in one Place only,  
they might have been accounted for more  
easily: But forasmuch as *Jesus Christ* tra-  
vell'd about from Place to Place, *healing the*  
*Sick, and casting out Devils*, there could be  
no Deceit, without supposing that the Plot  
was carry'd on at once in almost all Parts  
of Judea. But is this credible? Could a  
Person of low Education form a Design so  
vast, or conduct it so successfully? Is it  
conceivable, that a Man without Wealth,  
Power, or Interest, could seduce so vast a  
Number in almost every City? Or if this  
might have been, Is it credible that not one  
of these Accomplices should ever betray the  
Cheat? Did those who were employ'd in  
gaining Accomplices succeed in every Ap-  
plication? If not, whence was it that the  
whole Design was not blasted at once? I  
must conclude therefore, there was no Deceit  
in accomplishing these Facts, because from  
the Circumstances of Things there could be  
none.

\* this is very  
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of y<sup>e</sup> late to us now, & tho, it has been said  
to. 452. It should be allowed imprac:  
-table to impose

One Thing farther may be be obsery'd in  
reference to the Spectators in general; These  
must know whether the Persons pretended  
to be heal'd of inveterate Diseases, had really  
labour'd under them, or not; and if they  
had, whether they were really cured, or not:

They

on y<sup>e</sup>  
all Sim:  
of y<sup>e</sup> Cr

They must know, several of them at least, whether Persons said to have been rais'd had been really dead, and whether after this they were really alive : And, lastly, whether the Apostles were really illiterate Persons ; and if they were, whether they did (as 'tis affirm'd they did) on a sudden speak to every Man in his proper Tongue. If Men cannot be certain in such Cases as these, they cannot be sufficiently assur'd of any Thing. This rested on the Evidence of their Senses, and to this Evidence we appeal.

As little Difficulty will there be in proving that these Works were strictly supernatural. I think it is very plain that they could not be wrought by any mere human Skill or Power. If Diseases may be heal'd this Way, yet this cannot be done in an Instant ; It cannot be done without the Use of suitable Means, much less without the Use of any Means at all : No natural Agents can work at a Distance ; Nor can Effects of this Kind be produc'd merely by a Command. The Dead cannot be rais'd to Life by those who are unable to bestow Life ; Nor, can Men of themselves speak Languages they never learn'd, and perhaps scarce ever heard before. These Things are too evident to need Enlargements ; And therefore, if the Relations given of these Facts, with all their several Circumstances, be just, the Conclusion I would draw is certain. Every Effect requires

some

*on y<sup>e</sup> Senses of y<sup>e</sup> Spectators, yet  
all Times & places have Instances and  
of y<sup>e</sup> Credulity of Mankind as to related  
Wonders.*



some Cause proportionable to it; and that which cannot be produc'd in a natural way, must be supernatural.

After all, if there be any Evasion remaining, it must be This; That we are not perfectly acquainted with all the several Powers of Nature; That if we knew all the simple Powers, yet we might be Strangers to their several Compositions: And therefore, as we cannot say What their Results may be, so we cannot determine What is strictly and properly supernatural.

This Allegation must be vain, if we consider, That 'tis unreasonable to suppose any Effects to be natural, which cannot be accounted for in some natural Way; at least, where there are no Grounds to presume that they are really owing to some latent Powers in Nature: Such are those, of which we have never had any certain Instances either before or since these Times; and especially, if they have directly contradicted the known and standing Laws of Nature. Or, if it should be imagin'd that some of the Effects might possibly arise from unknown Powers; yet since these very Powers are suppos'd to be unknown, the Facts, as they stand in these Histories, will be still miraculous. Put the Case of Diseases being cured in an Instant; You will say, This might possibly happen by some lucky Coincidence of natural Causes of which we

*One Miracle will infallibly be allowed to be strictly Supernatural, i.e. above y<sup>e</sup> Power of Man, that is, casting out Devils. I wish y<sup>e</sup> Dean would in plain & intelligent Words and Sentiments*

*let us know how this is to be understood, if he believes that certain malignant Beings very superior to Man in Strength & Cunning have truly taken Possession of sundry human Bodies (as well as Hogs) at that Time, and really did M*



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know nothing. Very well : But if this were really unknown, How came our Saviour and his Apostles to apply, with such Success, this Coincidence of Causes to their own proper Purposes ? How came they to repeat this so frequently, and to succeed constantly ? To say, *Be thou heal'd*, and to have the Effect succeed immediately, where 'tis suppos'd that the several Circumstances really conducing to the Effect, are unknown, is itself a Miracle of the highest Nature. It argues, that the Speaker was directed by a Knowledge supernatural, tho' the Effect itself should be strictly natural.

It remains that I Enquire, What Force there is in the Argument deduc'd from hence in Favour of our Religion. This, one might think, could be no Matter of Enquiry. If the Facts themselves are supernatural, the Religion confirm'd by them must be so likewise. The Conclusion is plain, and hardly capable of being render'd plainer by any manner of Representation. This hath been allow'd by sober Men in all former Ages ; who, tho' they have question'd, and in many Cases justly question'd the Reality of the Facts, have thought, if this be once admitted, the Consequence deduc'd from it must be certain. However, Difficulties have of late been pretended ; and these must be examin'd before I close this Head.

*make the Bodies of such* What  
*Persons their Habitation or*  
*Dwelling places*



What hath been alledg'd to this Purpose is, 1. That Miracles being nothing more than Facts, can prove nothing but the Operation of some supernatural Power capable of producing them ; And that as there is no necessary Connexion between Miracles and Truths, so we cannot conclude the Truth of a Religion from the Miracles alledg'd for it. 2. That forasmuch as Miracles may be wrought as well by subordinate Beings as the supreme, as well by Evil Spirits as by Good ; so we cannot depend on any Arguments drawn from thence, unless we have some certain Way of discovering what are Divine Miracles, and what Otherwise ; at least, what are the Effects of a Good Power, and what of an Evil one.

As to the former Objection, I must allow, that Miracles are indeed Facts, which of themselves prove Nothing more than the Agency of some Cause proportionable ; and that as there is no necessary Connexion between Miracles and Truths, so Miracles are of themselves no Evidence of Truths. ~~But~~ then I must affirm, That Things which are not necessarily, and in their own Nature Signs, may yet become such by the Application ; and consequently, That Things may become the Proofs of Truth, which have no necessary Connexion with that Truth.

This will be plain, if we consider that Words spoken, are in themselves nothing more

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more than Sounds modify'd in a certain manner, between which and the Ideas they stand for in Speaking there is no Connexion at all. How then comes it to pass, that Men communicate their Thoughts to each other this Way? The Case is, Words which are not essentially Signs, are capable of being us'd as such; To this Purpose they have been and are apply'd: And consequently, where we are entirely secure of the Speaker's Honesty, we no more doubt his Sentiments express'd by Words, than we should tho' inwardly conscious to his Thoughts. The same may be observ'd concerning another Usage, viz. That of Seals. There is no necessary Connexion between the Use of these, and the Confirmation of a Bargain: Yet still, the usual Import of these being known, Men receive as full Satisfaction from them, as they would if they had been in their own Nature expressive of the Thing they signify.

To apply this to our present Purpose. Miracles are directly no more than Evidences of a supernatural Power: But when wrought at the Instance of Men, and apply'd by them as Evidences of a supernatural Commission, they carry with them the Nature of Seals, and are properly the Confirmation of that Authority they are alledg'd to support. Let us then suppose a Person claiming such an Authority as commission'd by a supernatural

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no signs of Will & intention*

...prove nothing of themselves

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462 A DEFENCE of

natural Power ; To support this Claim, Miracles are wrought, i.e. Works which argue the Interposition of such a Power ; What can we conclude but the Reality of a Commission deriv'd from him who wrought these Miracles. The Consequence is plain ; If the Person who wrought them had a Right to our Submission, the Person on whose Account they were wrought must have it likewise.

But this Kind of Arguing, our Adversaries will tell us, must be useless, because such Miracles may be wrought as well by Subordinate Beings as the Supreme, as well by Evil Spirits as Good. See how the Gentleman I am contending with represents the Matter. " If Evil Beings can impress Notions on Mens Minds as strongly as Good Beings, and cause Miracles to be done in Confirmation of them ; is there any way to know to which of the two, Notions thus impress'd are owing, but their Nature and Tendency, or those internal Marks of Wisdom and Goodness by which they plainly shew themselves to be a Part of natural Religion ? If so, can external Proofs carry us farther than internal Proofs do ? " p. 243.

What direct Power Evil Beings may possibly have on the Minds of Men, I pretend not to determine, nor, consequently, in how strong a Manner they may be capable of impressing

...especially too, when according to their own arbitrary, & are supposed to be unnecessary matters carrying within them Internal Evidence



impressing Notions on them. Only thus much I must observe, That our Author is very bold, in supposing that the Sense of a Divine Impulse can be founded on Nothing else than the Strength and Liveliness of the Impression. This he can have no Authority for affirming. I should think it much safer to leave this Matter in the dark, being confident of this alone, That if God should ever vouchsafe to make Impressions on Mens Minds, he would do it in such a Manner, (whatever that be), as should leave no Room to doubt the Author of the Impression. And if this may be, then there will be sufficient Difference between the Inspirations of God, and the Infusions of the Devil.

But the Point I am most concern'd with here, is this ; Miracles may be wrought as well by Evil Beings as Good ; and consequently alledg'd as well to confirm an Imposture, as a Truth ; If so, How shall we distinguish from what Cause these Miracles proceed ; and yet, without this, all Arguments drawn from Miracles must be precarious.

In Reply, I must observe, That there are Two Methods serviceable to this Purpose, in the proper Use of which Men cannot easily miscarry.

1. The Nature of the Doctrines which Miracles are alledg'd to confirm, must be consider'd ; because, if these are inconsistent with



but why  
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sideration  
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of a good  
e<sup>c</sup> wife  
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A DEFENCE of

with any certain and known Truths, they are incapable of Proof: No Miracles can, in such a Case, be of any Force; and therefore, if such are really wrought, we must conclude that they did not proceed from the God of Truth, but the Author of Lyes.

But if, upon such a Consideration, every Thing shall appear clear; i. e. If there be no Contradiction in the Doctrines themselves, nor Inconsistency with any certain Truth, then, (for any Thing we know to the contrary), they may be true; and if so, then they may be capable of sufficient Evidence from Proof external. There is no manner of Occasion, (as our Author contends there is), that these Matters should be prov'd by the internal Evidence of the Thing, or that they should shew themselves to be Parts of natural Religion by Marks of Wisdom and Goodness, of which every one is not capable of judging. \* If this were necessary, then external Proofs could carry us no farther than internal Proofs do; Then Miracles could have no Force, but where such Force is useless; and consequently, the working them for this Purpose must be unaccountable. But the Design of Miracles is, to supply the Want of internal Evidence, with regard to Matters capable of being confirm'd; and this Force they will have, if we can get sufficient farther Assurance that they are not wrought by the Interposition of malicious Beings.

\* Here's a plain Confession Miracles are To  
only proper to confirm things positive (see my  
note (462) but ought not to be previously to inquire  
what kind of being it is by whose power they  
are said to be wrought & are really wrought

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*is it all consistent with the character of a good & wise*

REVEAL'D RELIGION, &c. 465 *one to wish*

To this Purpose, it should be enquir'd, *the thing*  
2. Whether the Miracles wrought, are oppos'd *clearly*  
by any other Miracles alledg'd to prove the *really oppos'd*  
contrary; and if they are, then it should *which in*  
be consider'd on which Side there is the *their Nature*  
greatest Evidence of Power. The Case of *must leave*  
*Moses* and the Magicians determines the Point *at best*  
clearly: The Pretensions on both Sides were *doubtful*  
to be try'd by Miracles, i.e. by Instances *somewhat*  
of supernatural Power: These were alledg'd *kind of being*  
by both as Evidence: It is plain therefore, *they come*  
that the most extraordinary Instances were the *the Deity*  
strongest Evidence: The Magicians allow'd *but indeed*  
it, and confess'd the Finger of God. *rest, their*

But if the Miracles in this Case wrought to *point on a*  
confirm a Commission are unoppos'd by any *superiority*  
other Miracles, then we may conclude safely *of a miracle,*  
that they are, and must be in some Sense *or in It's*  
from God; They must be wrought, either *being unop-*  
by his own immediate Power, or, (which *posed by*  
amounts to much the same,) by his Appoint- *any other*  
ment. This must be concluded from the *Miracles*  
essential Perfections of the Divine Nature. *first of*  
They are (as hath been shewn already) In- *I think redi-*  
stances of supernatural Power; and therefore, *culously lab-*  
being urg'd to confirm a Divine Authority, *oured by*  
would never have been permitted by God, *to be*  
had the Person who alledg'd them no such *to be*  
Authority, and were there no other Means *in the*  
whereby the Fraud might be detected. No *creature*  
Earthly Prince would permit his Name and *by*  
Authority to be usurp'd, without taking some *Means*

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Methods

*Suppose God's Goodness is not suffer by*  
*to be in opposition; but what avail it to his creatures*  
*Whether false Religions are in opposition or not*  
*by Means of Miracles or otherwise in the*  
*his creatures judge in an opposition*

...Nature of the Doctrine proposed  
the Superiority of the Miracle being as I've

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Said Medicines  
...for  
...reason  
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...Mankind could  
not rightly  
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and if they  
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Methods to vindicate his Honour! Much less would he lay his Subjects under the unhappy Necessity of acting contrary to his Will, even whilst they are most desirous of obeying it entirely. We deny not but there may be Powers in several created Beings of working Miracles; and in what Instances God may permit them to exercise these Powers we cannot say precisely: Yet, this we may be bold to affirm, that He will not suffer them to interpose to the Prejudice of his own Authority, because it is inconsistent with his Wisdom; nor to delude Mankind unavoidably in the most important Affairs, because it is irreconcilable with his Goodness.

Upon the Whole then, If the Gospel Histories are faithful Records; If the Facts there recorded were real Facts, and not mere Illusions; If they were properly miraculous, and alledg'd to support the Divine Authority of our Religion; If in this Religion there are no Articles incapable of being prov'd, &c. inconsistent with any of the certain Conclusions of Reason; And if, Lastly, the Miracles wrought to confirm this Religion have never been oppos'd by greater, nor indeed by any other Miracles at all, then I must conclude that this Religion is really from God.

I have now gone through with what was propos'd at first. I have endeavour'd to support the Cause of Revelation against the Reasonings of this Gentleman, under the

several  
...is good & wise, as well as powerful, can any thing  
...to be attested, come from him that is inconsistent  
...his Wisdom & Goodness, and have we any other  
...of judging what actions are agreeable to those  
...in God than what we make





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several Articles heretofore produc'd, and am not aware I have left any Thing unexamin'd, which was proper to be consider'd, and fell within the Compass of my Design. I must confess indeed, I have not enter'd into a particular Defence of certain Doctrines, against which he hath rather insinuated Objections than urg'd them: This I have omitted, not only because the Points themselves have been frequently consider'd by other Writers, but likewise because The Gentleman expresses himself in so very loose a Manner, that 'tis difficult to say in what Sense he is willing to be understood. If he expects to be consider'd on those Heads, I must desire him to explain himself more distinctly; and then, if he calls on me, I shall be ready to attend him. At present I take my Leave, with this Observation only, That a Debate concerning *Natural* and *Reveal'd* Religion ought to be carried on by Methods consistent with *Natural* Religion at least. I hope I have not offended this Way: How far the Gentleman I have been concern'd with, can say the same, let the World judge.

The E N D.

x we of so Judge what are so in Relation to those ~~Qualities~~ Qualities in our ~~creatures~~ creatures, that is y. we of ~~the~~ the rational Faculties & Sentiments w. he has implanted in us.

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*Nulla modo cogimur, aut retentâ præscientiâ Dei, tollere voluntatis arbitrium, aut retento voluntatis arbitrio, Deum, quod nefas est, negare præscium futurorum: sed utrumque amplectimur, utrumque fideliter & veraciter confitemur. Illud, ut bene credamus; hoc, ut bene vivamus. Aug. de Civ. Dei, l. 5. c. 10.*

As for Socinus's Resolution, That God foresees only Things foreseeable, and that Contingents are not such, but only those that come to pass by his Decree, I conceive it is as dangerous as Mr. Calvin's, that he predetermines all things, and

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